

Easter Sunday - Resurrection of the Lord
April 21, 2019
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Reflection

Over the past few days, I've referred to the fire at Notre-Dame Cathedral. On Good Friday, I mentioned how they rescued the Crown of Thorns. It reminds us of the Third Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary: the Crowning with Thorns. The fruit of the mystery is contempt, or detachment from respect. Jesus demonstrated his contempt during his passion; he was detached from betrayal, denial, accusation and mockery. At the Easter Vigil, I mentioned how hives of bees on a lower roof were spared. Bees make wax which go into the paschal candle. The light from the candle reminds us of the light of faith which brings us to eternal life. The Crown of Thorns was rescued by heroic firefighters, but the hives of bees were spared by the hand of God. The sacraments that bring us faith are the work of man, charged with the power of the Holy Spirit. Today I echo the hope that the cathedral will be rebuilt. Some people are comparing that to the resurrection; rising from ashes to life. But I suggest that rebuilding the cathedral is more like a resuscitation. Doctors do that when they bring someone back to life. Jesus did that in a more remarkable way when he raised up Lazarus. But the resurrection is different.

When Lazarus was raised, others had to roll back the stone.

Acts 10:34a, 37-43
Ps 118
Col 3:1-4
Jn 20:1-18

When someone is brought back to life, doctors blow air into the lungs and cause the heart to restart. These interventions are beyond the power of person who has died; they are in the hands of his neighbour. The resurrection is different. When Mary Magdalene arrived at the tomb, the stone had already been rolled away. She found only an empty tomb. There was nothing for her to do but grieve and run and tell the others. The resurrection was beyond our help and beyond our ability. It was the work of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

When Lazarus was raised, he emerged from the tomb bound by linen bindings. He was still tied to earthly life, would die again a natural death, and face corruption in the tomb. The resurrection is different. Peter looked in the empty tomb and saw the linen bindings lying there. Jesus was resurrected free of the bindings. Victorious over death, he was freed from the corruption that the bindings try to restrain. With a glorified body, he could bring a human nature made perfect into the Trinity.

John entered the tomb immediately after Peter. He saw the face napkin neatly rolled up and placed in the corner. Jesus had put it there with care as a sign for John to find. It showed that Jesus willed his resurrection, in keeping with God's plan. He willed his resurrection just as he willed his death, in accordance with the Scriptures. When Lazarus died the first time, his illness overcame his will to live.

Death left him languishing in Sheol hoping for forgiveness, awaiting his redemption. He was in God's hands and died at a time of God's choosing. But Jesus was in control of his own death and resurrection. John would come to remember what Jesus had said about his life: "I have power to lay it down, and power to take it up again (Jn 10:18)." In his humanity, Jesus had the power to lay down his life. In his divinity, he had the power to raise it up again.

In our humanity, we suffer and die. But through his divinity, Jesus will raise us up. Lazarus died a second time, but he found Jesus waiting for him, welcoming him into heaven. Like us, like the communion of saints, he will share in the resurrection on the last day.

The resuscitation of Lazarus required faith on the part of Mary and Martha. We too require faith in order to enter heaven and then share in the resurrection. We received faith through the grace of God from the preaching of the Church. This preaching dates back to the witness of the apostles. In today's Gospel we see how the apostles grew in faith. They saw the empty tomb and the discarded linens. They believed God had acted in a mysterious way, but needed more. They needed Jesus to open their eyes to the truth of his resurrection. They needed him to explain his resurrection in the light of Scripture. And they needed a witness. Jesus showed himself to Mary Magdalene, grieving with love. He spoke her name, "Mary!" She clung to him.

But remade from servant to sister, beholding brother and Lord, she was charged with a mission: to proclaim the risen Christ to the men: "I have seen the Lord." This critical step prepared the men to believe with the fullness of Easter faith; to see the Lord when he came before them, eating and drinking with his chosen ones. Equipped with faith, they followed his command: "to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God." Their words and deeds are the building stones of the Church that Christ built upon Peter, his rock. They instruct us on how to live our Christian life, "seeking the things that are above;" "setting our minds on things that are above." With our eyes fixed on heaven, we proclaim with the saints who preceded us: "Christ is risen, he is truly risen." Our Easter faith fulfills the psalm with certain hope: "I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the Lord."