

The Resurrection Changes Everything

Easter 2017

There's a story about a young boy named Walter Elias. Born in the city, his parents one day moved out to the country to become farmers. Walter had a vivid imagination and the farm was the perfect place for a young boy and a wondering mind. One day in the apple orchard he was amazed when he saw sitting on a branch of one of the apple trees an owl. He just stood there and stared at the owl. He thought about what his father had told him about owls: owls always rested during the day because they hunted throughout the night. This owl was asleep. Walter also thought that this owl might make a great pet.

Being careful not to make any noises he stepped over sticks and leaves. The owl was in a deep sleep because it never heard Walter Elias walking toward it. Finally, standing under the owl, he reached up and grabbed the owl by the legs. Now, the events that followed are difficult to explain. Suddenly everything was utter chaos. The owl came to life. Walter's thoughts about keeping the bird as a pet were quickly forgotten. The air filled with wings, and feathers, and screaming. In the excitement, Walter held the legs tighter. And in his panic, Walter Elias, still holding on to the owl, threw it to the ground and stomped it to death. After things calmed down, Walter looked at the now dead and bloody bird and began to cry. He ran back to the farm, obtained a shovel, and buried the owl in the orchard.

At night, he would dream of that owl. As the years passed he never got over what had happened that summer day. Deep down it affected him for the rest of his life. As an older man he said he never, ever killed anything again. Do you see it? Something significant happened after that event. Something that Walter didn't miss. Something which transformed Walter Elias, something that redeemed him from the pit of despair, something that resurrected him, something that made Walter Elias Disney give life to thousands of animals on the big screen.

The resurrection changes everything. It transforms us. It moves us from despair to new possibilities of life. It takes us in our blindness and opens our eyes. It transforms ordinary bread into the body and blood of Jesus. It takes Mary Magdalene, Peter and John who had lost the only the world they knew and gives it back to them but even greater than before.

Jesus comes to them and says see I am not dead. I am alive. Now tell the world.

The Resurrection changes everything because of what St. Augustine tells us in a sermon on the Cross:

Jesus performed the most wonderful exchange with us. Through us, he died; through him, we shall live.¹

¹ <http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/loh/lent/holymondayer.htm>

Here is how the Resurrection changes everything. By taking on our mortal flesh Jesus enables us to share in his immortal life. When we truly come to realize what this means for us it changes the way we live. Because we are now participants in the Lord Jesus Christ's immortal nature, we become people whose lives in this world become increasingly moral. Knowing of our immortal future makes us moral in the present. Morality is directly related to the Resurrection. Morality is not just a way of behaving but a way of being; not simply "living a good life" but becoming "a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17), becoming "a little Christ".²

St Paul in this morning's reading from Colossians tells us that the Resurrection of Jesus gives to us a new mindset which in turn inspires within us a new heart transforming the way we live now.

Two practical consequences flow from this teaching. The first is the need to seek the "things that are above", that is, the things of God. Secondly, we learn to cultivate a way to pass unnoticed in one's everyday work and ordinary life, yet to do everything with a supernatural purpose in mind.

Regarding the first of these, Paul writes:

seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things that are above

With this passage in mind the Second Vatican Council has written:

"In their pilgrimage to the heavenly city Christians are to seek and relish the things that are above (cf. Col 3:1–2): this involves not a lesser, but a greater commitment to working with all people to build a world that is more human" ³

Work, family relationships, social involvements—every aspect of human affairs—should be approached in a spirit of faith and done perfectly, out of love: The true Christian, who acts according to their faith always has their sights set on God. Their outlook is supernatural. Christians work in this world of ours, which they love passionately; they are involved in all its challenges, but all the while their eyes are fixed on heaven.

Having our eyes fixed on heaven is the first practical consequence of how the Resurrection changes everything.

Secondly, we learn to live an unnoticed life in the present. St Paul puts it this way:

Set your minds not on things that are on earth, 3 for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

² Kreeft, Peter. Catholic Christianity (p. 158). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

³ (Gaudium et spes, 57).

Ordinary life, everyday interests, the desire to be better and to serve others without seeking public recognition of one's merits—all this makes for holiness if done for love of God. A simple life "hid with Christ in God" (v. 3) is so important that Jesus himself chose to spend the greater part of his life on earth living like an ordinary person: he was the son of a tradesman. "As we meditate on these truths, we come to understand better the logic of God. We come to realize that the supernatural value of our life does not depend on accomplishing great undertakings. Rather it is to be found in the faithful acceptance of God's will, in welcoming generously the opportunities for small, daily sacrifice"

This means that as we seek holiness by imitating Jesus in his hidden life and will therefore be people full of hope; we will be optimistic and joy-filled people and after our death we will share in the glory of the Lord: we will hear Jesus' praise, "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master" (Mt 25:21).

Morality is not just about behaviour but about having a mind that is set on the things above. When we come to see how the Resurrection changes everything we will celebrate how our immortal nature, a life raised with Christ, will shape us to form a moral nature now because we are living the hidden life with God.