

The Resurrection Changes Everything

Easter 2020

I have been thinking a lot about the Lord of the Rings as we face these days that are so unsettling. In the Book Version of the Story, when Frodo realizes he has to leave the comfort of the Shire in order to keep the Ring from getting into the hand of Sauron that would result in the destruction of Middle Earth, he says these words to Gandalf, the Grey, the wise and kind wizard:

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.

“So, do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given.”

This is such wise council; it is not ours to decide the times in which we are now called to live. Think too of the experience for the first followers of Jesus. What a Holy Week they experienced. The events of Palm Sunday, where the crowd gathered in cheerful celebration welcoming Jesus into the city has many of the same people present of Good Friday, their joyful Hosannas turned into the jeering: “Crucify him”. Here is the thing though, for the Apostles when they saw the events of Holy Week subsequent to the Resurrection, the Resurrection changed their perspective on how they viewed their circumstances. After the Resurrection those who had opposed Jesus before Easter Sunday were still as hostile. As we will see in the weeks to come, the Acts of the Apostles makes this very clear how strong were the challenges and opposition faced by the Apostles. And while the world they lived in was the same before as it was after Easter Sunday, these men and women were different. For you see, 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 and wine into the body and blood of Jesus. It takes Mary Magdalene, Peter and John who had lost the only world they knew and gives it back to them but even greater than before.

How pertinent this theme is for us today; an Easter unlike any we have ever known before. Not able to gather together in person can give even greater meaning to our celebration, because like Mary Magdalene at the tomb that first Easter morning, we wonder, where have you taken my Lord? What has happened to the world that now is in a kind of isolation similar to that of the Holy Saturday Tomb. Indeed, in a normal year, Holy Saturday is the only day the Eucharist is not available to the Faithful. But this year - we are experiencing a prolonged Holy Saturday. And so particularly this year we need to hear the Easter message.

Here’s 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 his death and resurrection 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. And at a time like this it is so important for us as Jesus’ disciples to live well purposeful and godly lives, the meaning of morality. Knowing of our immortal future makes us moral in the present. Morality is directly related to the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. 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”.¹

Have you ever noticed that there is only a one letter difference between the words moral and mortal? It is the letter t. When we take to heart our mortality, we are brought face to face with our death and the cross. This crisis confronts us with our mortality with increased force. The letter t is the Cross. The Lord of the Rings is a deeply Catholic Story and this is why Gandalf says to Frodo:

But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given

This is a great definition of morality and so we are asked the question: How will we live these days that have been given to us? The Resurrection changes everything, most especially how we view the letter t and the meaning of the Cross. Because death is not the end, we with Peter, John and Mary can believe, and it makes all the difference to how we live in the present.

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”²

Work, family relationships, social involvements—every aspect of human affairs—should be approached in a spirit of faith and done 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. The Resurrection you see becomes therefore the energy to motivate us to live with caring purpose through this pandemic.

¹ Kreeft, Peter. Catholic Christianity (p. 158). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

² (Gaudium et spes, 57).

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.

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". May this be your focus during the 40 Days of Easter in the unusual year we deem 2020!

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. And it is my hope that together we will discover the meaning of these words:

All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given.