

The Resurrection Changes Everything

Easter Sunday 2022

In a place called “the Golgotha of the modern world”—Auschwitz concentration camp—in the little-known cell 21, block 11, thirty-year-old Lt. Stefan Jasiński awaited death. He was a special forces officer in the clandestine army of the Polish Underground State, which had as its mission to identify the situation of the death camp, to bring hope to prisoners, and to organize escapes. The Poles rightly believed that the Nazis intended to destroy any evidence of the crimes committed in the camps, so in a highly dangerous operation, Jasiński made his way to the area around Auschwitz and was given cover by local peasant resistance groups. In a Nazi raid in July of 1944, he was captured, brutally interrogated, and imprisoned in Auschwitz, his cell in the infamous Death Block only feet away from the cell of the great Polish martyr St. Maximilian Kolbe. The place was an image of hell—cramped, devoid of light, rank, oppressive, desolate, battered by the harsh voices of the guards, the groans of the prisoners, and the sound of gunfire as victims were executed. Yet God was not absent. For, upon the walls of his dark, bleak chamber, Jasiński, a trained architect, had scratched into the plaster his masterpiece—an image of the Merciful Jesus. (See end of the text for this image) In the chaos that surrounded him, Jasiński clung to a deeper reality—one that was more true than the prison walls that held him. His engraved art was an expression of his faith in the one who says, “I have engraved you into the palm of my hand” (Isa. 49:16)—the one who suffered, died, and rose for him, the heart that gave hope and purpose to his own.

Art in Auschwitz could pierce the hell in which it was created because God had pierced hell itself. True art manifests God’s presence and transcendence; he is not only with us—Emmanuel—but he is also elevating and transforming us. Tapping into this power of God who creates out of nothing, who brings light into darkness, we can understand the witness of artists who become co-creators of beauty in places of utter desolation. For Jasiński the death and resurrection of Jesus transformed the hell of Auschwitz into a place where he encountered the merciful resurrected Jesus.¹

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.

Jesus comes to them and says: “See I am not dead. I am alive. Now tell the world”.

The Resurrection changes everything explained St Augustine this way:

Jesus performed the most wonderful exchange with us. Through us, he died; through him, we shall live.²

¹ <https://wordonfire.institute/pdfviewer/winter-2021/page/64>

² <http://www.liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/loh/lent/holymundayor.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 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. 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".³

You know 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. The letter t is the Cross.

The Resurrection changes everything, most especially how we view the letter t and the meaning of the Cross. Because death is not the end and we with Peter, John, Mary, and Stefan can believe, 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"⁴

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.

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

³ Kreeft, Peter. Catholic Christianity (p. 158). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

⁴ (Gaudium et spes, 57).

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"

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).

Jasieński died under mysterious circumstances just three weeks before Auschwitz was liberated. His mission initially appeared to be a failure, as he was unable to proclaim the truth of Auschwitz's atrocities to the world. Yet, in the light of Christ, it was a tremendous success because he attained an interior freedom that allowed him to make Truth himself known. His artwork was discovered twenty years after his death and continues to tell the story of the victory that is found in Jesus.

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 as the story of Stefan Jasieński so vividly illustrates.

