

Friday of the 24th Friday in Ordinary Time

Memorial St. Cornelius and St. Cyprian

1 Corinthians 15:12–20

Psalm 17:1b–d, 6–7, 8b, 15

Luke 8:1–3

Letters can clear up a lot of misunderstandings, especially if the author's name is St. Paul and the recipients have an address in Corinth, Greece. Here again in today's reading the Apostle is responding some Corinthian confusion because as they had done with other theological matters they were responding this talk about the Resurrection with a "say what?" Many in Corinth were saying when we are dead – that's it folks. Lights out, door closed, game is over. After we take our last breath there won't be anything else.

Paul counters with a 'now just hold on a moment friends'. Think about what you are saying..... The way Paul writes his prose has the quality of a domino effect and is a tight and logical argument:

- If the dead are not raised, that is if we are not to be raised from the dead,
then Christ has not been raised
- If Christ has not been raised then our proclamation has been in vain
- If our proclamation has been in vain then your faith has been in vain
- If your faith has been in vain we have been misrepresenting God because we declared he raised Christ from the dead

Without belief in the Resurrection of the Body then all we are doing in the present life of faith is absolutely futile. There is no point being here. Without the Resurrection let's cancel all confessions, because we are still in our sins. Without the Resurrection of the body let's cancel all funerals because the dead have perished – that's it folks. Without the Resurrection of the Body it is pointless to believe in Jesus so don't bother coming for Mass. As Paul then says in one of his most poignant lines:

If for this life only we have hoped in Christ we are of all people the most to be pitied.

However says Paul:

“In Fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of all who have died.”

Paul’s conviction in the historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ informs everything about this present life.

In the third century Pope Cornelius and Bishop Cyprian shared this same conviction. At a time when a priest named Novatian tried to wrest the Chair of Peter from Cornilius, Cyprian came to the Pope’s aid. Cyprian and Cornelius both died martyrs during the Decian persecution in the 250s.

I would like to end with a quote from Cyprian describing his conversion to Christ. He was the son of pagan parents and in his earlier life was a wealthy and successful professor. He was a man who lived to eat, drink and be merry.

These words point to the purpose his life took on once he came to believe in Jesus and the hope of the Resurrection:

I was entangled in the thousand errors of my previous life; I did not think I could get free of them, for I was so much the slave of my vices... and I had such complaisance in the evils which had become my constant companions. But the regenerating water washed me from the stains of my previous life, and a light from on high shone into my heart thus purified from its corruptions, and the Spirit coming from heaven changed me into a new man by a second birth. And immediately, in a wonderful way, I saw certitude take the place of doubt.

If we take seriously Paul’s affirmation here, we need to ask ourselves whether faith in the eternal life of the resurrection is *in fact* the dominant magnet of our life as it became for Cyprian. Am I, like Paul, living the kind of life that would be foolish apart from the reality of the resurrection? Am I really betting everything on Christ, or am I hedging my bets, making sure I squeeze everything I can out of this life while hoping not to lose out on the next?

May we affirm again the centrality of the Resurrection to our faith. Let us have the certitude St. Paul proclaims in today’s Epistle. Let us rekindle the certitude expressed by Cyprian. Let us have the certitude to proclaim Christ is Risen as we do every Sunday when we proclaim:

I believe in the Resurrection of the Body and life everlasting. Amen