

Resurrection Now

"What is the significance of our Lord's Resurrection for the present?" writes Fr Donncha Ó hAodha in the current issue of 'Position Papers'.

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“What’s in it for me?”

It happened a few years ago after a baptism ceremony. A young man came up to me when the rite was over and took me aside. In a friendly and frank way he said: “That was a grand homily Father ... for the

already committed. But you need to remember that at least half of the congregation there are not committed to their faith. When you are preaching, keep in mind that what your listeners are asking themselves in their own minds is: *'What is in this for me? And what's in it for me here and now?'*

I think that was good homiletic advice and I'm grateful for it. One might of course object that preaching the Gospel is not about pandering to people's self-interest or impatience. However if the Catholic Faith is precisely the Good News for which everyone is deeply longing, it makes sense that the preacher try to present it in all its beauty, trying to show its compelling attraction for the here and now... (This is not to forget, of course, that the real Preacher in any homily is of course the Holy Spirit).

The Resurrection of Jesus is the corner-stone of our faith. On this everything stands or falls. “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain” (1 Cor 15:14). During the Easter Season the Church is “overcome with paschal joy” (Easter Prefaces). We realise the ineffable grandeur of the fact of Christ’s rising from the dead at a particular moment *in the past*. We look forward to our rising with Christ too *in the future*, since he is the “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor 15:20). But, what is the significance of our Lord’s Resurrection for the *present*? And what’s in it for *me*, and for *us, here and now*?”

Almost too good to be true

The awesome reality is that through grace we share here and now in the life of the risen Christ. As St Thomas

Aquinas puts it: “Grace is nothing else but a certain beginning of glory in us.” The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is not simply an awesome past event, or a future hope, but it is somehow where we dwell here and now through the life of grace. This is almost too good to be true, but, thankfully, it is in fact a reality.

Our life is hidden with Christ in God (cf. Col 3:3). Hence the most ordinary everyday things – tidying our room, bringing the children to school, working on the computer, listening to music, resting, suffering, loving, smiling – are transfused with the radiant light of the Risen One. “There is something holy, something divine, hidden in the most ordinary situations, and it is up to each one of you to discover it,” St Josemaría encourages us in his programmatic homily *Passionately loving the world*. What is this *quid divinum*, this “something holy”, if not that great

and supreme *Someone*, the ultimate One, The Alpha and the Omega, the risen and living Christ?

Already and not yet

It is true that we will share fully in the Resurrection of our Lord only at the end of time when our Saviour “will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself” (Phil 3:21). As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1002) explains: “Christ will raise us up ‘on the last day’; but it is also true that, in a certain way, we have already risen with Christ. For by virtue of the Holy Spirit, Christian life is already now on earth a participation in the death and Resurrection of Christ”.

We naturally tend to think of heaven as something we aspire to for after death. However the life of a daughter or son of God here and now is

already a sharing in the eternal life of the risen Christ.

Thinking back to that Baptism homily, perhaps I could have spoken about this sacrament as precisely our entry into the fullness of life for which we are all created and in which our deepest hopes and desires are fulfilled and immeasurably surpassed. *The Resurrection of Christ: What's in it for me?* Everything I really need and seek. Nothing less.

It's hard to beat the baptismal catechesis of St Paul: "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus, were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (*Rom 6:1-3-4*).

The adventure of a life-time ... and beyond.

Our participation in the Resurrection of Christ is above all a free and unmerited gift. It is also a mission: the task and adventure of a life-time. God who created us without us, will not save us without us as St Augustine taught. Salvation is the fruit of a dialogue between divine grace and human freedom. It is up to us to let the life of the Risen Lord come to fruition in us.

This is why St Paul encourages the Colossians, and indeed all of us: “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things which are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (Col 3:1). The spiritual life is not in the first instance an arduous effort on our part, but an openness to the gift of God. Receiving a participation in Christ’s glory, does however call on

our response and initiative. Love is always a decision and the way of holiness must be freely chosen. As St Ambrose preached: “We do not live any longer our own life, but the life of Christ, the life of innocence, chastity, simplicity, and of every virtue. We have risen with Christ; we must live in Christ; we must ascend in Christ, so that the serpent can no longer find our heel to wound.”

Easter time is a good time to begin again on our Christian journey, being carried along by the overflowing life of Christ present in his Church.

“Same old, same old”... NOT!

We are probably all challenged to a greater or lesser degree by the restrictions of these pandemic times. Being in the same place and doing the same things day after day can test our patience. We long for variety, more colour, different activities,

more contact with other people, and all of this is only human.

There is also, however, a providential opportunity in our being restricted (otherwise, God would not let this happen). It is a chance to rediscover the present moment and the presence of the living Christ here and now in others, in our daily activities and in ourselves. “Christ is alive in Christians”, says St Josemaría in a homily on the Resurrection. “Our faith teaches us that man, in the state of grace, is divinised – filled with God.... And this divinisation affects everything human; it is a sort of foretaste of the final resurrection ... Christ’s life is our life” (*Christ is passing by* 103).

It’s true that the monotony of the days can get to us. Yet there is nothing boring about the company of the living Christ. Each meeting with

the risen Jesus in our ordinary daily life, in lockdown or out of lockdown, “the sweet and gentle surprise of his encounter” (St Josemaría), is fresh and unique and beautiful and is a summons to reach out to others. The antidote to monotony and boredom, and to the temptation of discouragement, is prayer and evangelisation.

During his recent moving pastoral visit to Iraq the Holy Father addressed the faithful in the Cathedral of Our Lady of Salvation in Bagdad. In that very cathedral a number of people had lost their lives in a bomb attack ten years ago, and their cause for beatification is underway.

Pope Francis said: “We know how easy it is to be infected by the virus of discouragement that at times seems to spread all around us. Yet the Lord has given us an effective

vaccine against that nasty virus. It is the hope, it is the hope born of persevering prayer and daily fidelity to our apostolates. With this vaccine, we can go forth with renewed strength, to share the joy of the Gospel as missionary disciples and living signs of the presence of God's kingdom of holiness, justice and peace. How much the world around us needs to hear that message! Let us never forget that Christ is proclaimed above all by the witness of lives transformed by the joy of the Gospel. As we see from the earliest history of the Church in these lands, a living faith in Jesus is 'contagious'; it can change the world" (Address, 5 March 2021).

Through prayer and apostolate, love and care for others, we discover and rediscover the presence of the risen Christ.

The Resurrection and the Cosmos

The poet Gerard Manley Hopkins seems to capture the ever-new freshness of the Lord's Resurrection in his poem "God's Grandeur".

*The world is charged with the
grandeur of God.*

*It will flame out, like shining from
shook foil;*

*It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze
of oil*

*Crushed. Why do men then now not
reck his rod?*

*Generations have trod, have trod,
have trod;*

*And all is seared with trade; bleared,
smeared with toil;*

*And wears man's smudge and shares
man's smell: the soil*

*Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being
shod.*

And for all this, nature is never spent;

*There lives the dearest freshness deep
down things;*

*And though the last lights off the
black West went*

*Oh, morning, at the brown brink
eastward, springs –*

*Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and
with ah! bright wings.*

Hopkins' reference to the East, to
where the Rising Sun is reborn
evokes the

Lord's Resurrection by the power of
the Holy Ghost. (Much more indeed
could

be said about the Holy Spirit who
makes us sharers in Christ's
Resurrection, but there is no space

here to do this justice. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1988, 2017).

The Resurrection of Christ: What's in it for me? What's in it for us? Here and now? "The dearest freshness deep down things." That is: Communion with the living Christ and with his People, which is fullness of life and love.

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