

## THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS: OUR LIFE

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### **Abstract**

*At Easter we celebrate a super extraordinary event. In the words of Pope John Paul II, paraphrasing St. Augustine: “We are the Easter people and ‘Alleluia’ is our song”. We all sing ‘alleluia’ today to praise and thank the Lord for the wonders He has worked for us. Easter, the celebration of the Lord’s resurrection is the center of the whole year of worship, ‘the feast of all feasts’. Our faith, our hope and the meaning of Christian life is founded on Jesus’ resurrection. Despite the surety of the Christian belief, the idea of the resurrection and its effect or relevance in Christian life has often been either underplayed or exaggerated. This paper therefore sets out to theologically affirm this historical reality of faith, examining counter theories of the resurrection by examining their logical correspondence and hypothetical soundness. As this essay will reveal, in as much as the resurrection of Christ cannot be definitely disproved, it becomes a fundamental element and in fact the most radical of Christian faith as the conclusion of the work revealed, to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to believe as well in the possibility and reality of change in one’s life. This essay also clarifies the existential concreteness of the resurrection; it is not a raising from the dead which postpones an inevitable fate still but rather a definitive victory of Christ over death. Different formulations of the creed and magisterial statements give complete credence to this faith. This is the faith of the*

*Christian Church from its beginning, celebrated in her ceremonies and rituals and lived in the life of Christians.*

**Keywords:** Resurrection, supernatural event, Christian faith

### **Introduction**

We are in the year 2019 (Two thousand and Nineteen Years, since the beginning of the calculation of time and history). In fact, Two thousand and Nineteen Years since the birth of Christ - God became Man - the word was made flesh and dwelt among us. It is 2019 years since this happened; when God entered time and made time sacred. That was an extraordinary event in every sense of that word. Ever since then in mankind's history a lot of things have taken place. Consider for a moment what mankind has accomplished. We have built spaceships that can leave our solar system. We have transplanted hearts into a week-old babies. We have computerized everything from architecture to zoology. We have made tremendous progress in many areas of life. We are, as some people claim, at the apex of history. Nothing is so new that it has never been heard or seen before, and nothing is so old that it will never be seen or heard again. As the American astronauts landed on the moon for the first time, the then President Nixon declared: "This is the greatest event in the history of the world since the day of creation." To this exaggerated statement Bill Graham responded: "The President seems mistaken because the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus are the greatest and most important events in the history of the world." That is true indeed, it was true, it remains true till this very day; and it will continue to be true forever. Alleluia!

At Easter we celebrate a super extraordinary event. While the law of science stipulates a cycle of life and death, while other religions celebrate cycles of birth and death, Christianity insists that in one unique historical moment, the cycle is reversed, and a dead man came back to life.<sup>1</sup> That something which was never seen or heard before, or to be again, happened. Round this revolves the whole economy of the Christian religion. St Augustine used to say,

“The faith of Christians is the resurrection of Jesus.” Using the words of the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, while paraphrasing St. Augustine: “We are the Easter people and ‘Alleluia’ is our song”. Alleluia, as we know, is composed of two Hebrew words ‘allelu’ and ‘ia’. The former is the imperative form of the verb hailal which means ‘to praise’, while the latter is a shortened form of the personal name of God, Yahweh. ‘Alleluia’ thus means “praise the Lord”. Throughout the Christian era, ‘alleluia’ has been the outburst of the Church, the authentic response to the joyful, Easter event. We all sing ‘alleluia’ today to praise and thank the Lord for the wonders He has worked for us.

In fact ‘we are truly the Easter people and alleluia is our song’. Easter, the celebration of the Lord’s resurrection is the center of the whole year of worship, ‘the feast of all feasts’. Our faith, our hope and the meaning of Christian life is founded on Jesus’ resurrection. Paul expressed it well: “If Christ has not risen from the dead, then our believing is useless. . . ” (1 Cor 15). The Resurrection of Jesus is a fundamental element and in fact the most radical of Christian faith. It is theologically relevant in that it is essential for being identified as a Christian. To be a Christian is to believe in Jesus Christ not only as a great man of the past, even the greatest, but as someone ever living among us. Otherwise his coming twenty centuries ago leaves us entirely indifferent and He interests us no more than Napoleon or Julius Caesar. Not to admit the Resurrection of Jesus means that one is not a Christian. Such issues which deal with the uniqueness of Jesus can never become irrelevant to Christians except as the price of making Christianity itself irrelevant. No doubt the Resurrection is a central and inexhaustible mystery. To attempt an account of the redemption without including the Resurrection is to end in a deadlock. “No approach to New Testament Christology is possible without coming to terms with the resurrection.”<sup>2</sup> Through the centuries many princes and rulers have tried to stop the majestic wave of the news of the resurrection of Jesus – first the synagogue, then Roman Empire, and then Communist regimes. But the resurrection of Jesus is still being proclaimed and celebrated. The resurrection of Jesus is the most powerful, liberating, joyful message we can hear.

### **Questioning the Resurrection of Jesus**

But then, let us stop awhile and address ourselves to some pertinent concerns. The resurrection is ridiculed and rejected in some quarters, even supposedly ‘Christian’ quarters. It is important that we get the right and proper meaning of what we are celebrating. Inasmuch as we do not intend to be unnecessarily apologetic, it is also important that we brighten some clouds, clean some doubts, and settle some difficulties often associated with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Among the various stories and theories used to doubt or discredit the event of the resurrection are the following:

**1. The Fraud Theory:** that the disciples of Jesus fugitively slipped to the tomb at night and stole his body, hid it somewhere and then circulated the report that he had risen from the dead. (cf. Matt 28: 13) Therefore the whole story is a hoax, a deliberate imposture. D. Whitaker is of such opinion that the body of Jesus was stolen by thieves. This idea even goes back to New Testament times, and according to Matthew 28:13, it was even put forward by the Jewish elders in their attempt to bribe the Roman soldiers. It figured in Origen’s debate with Celsus, in which Origen argued that men do not suffer persecution and risk martyrdom for a lie.

Now we ask: how is this possible with the putting of seals on the stone and the soldiers to guard there? The soldiers could not be bribed to open it. How would they know it if they were asleep? What good would the body of Jesus have done them? And again, if they were afraid to fight for Jesus when he was alive (cf. Matt. 2: 56; Mk. 14: 50), how would they have the courage to risk their lives when he was dead? As it is commonly said: “the courage to die for one’s beliefs is given for those who have the courage to live for them.” The disciples were not trying to prove anything; in fact they were reluctant to believe in him after they saw him alive again. Sincere belief in the resurrection does not spring up causally. Indeed the pain and disillusionments of life and the scepticism of this world would almost seem to make confident faith in the resurrection foolish or impossible.

Long ago, St. Augustine gave a decisive answer to this theory when he said: “You bring forward as witness men who were sleeping. Truly, it is you who have fallen asleep, you who have failed in examining such things. If they were asleep, what could they have seen? If they saw nothing, how are they witnesses?”

**2. The Swoon Theory:** holds the view that Jesus was not really dead; that he had only swoon or fainted for the soldiers did not kill him and that the cool, quiet tomb and spices caused him to revive and come back to life. The rationalist H. E. G. Paulus put forward this theory and in more recent times a similar view has been set out by H. Schonfield in “The Passover Plot” (1965).

We respond to this theory as follows:

But the fact of Jesus’ death was clear. The facts are evident. The soldiers pierced his side with the spear before Joseph of Arimathea took him down from the cross. If there were any possibility that Jesus was still alive, Mary and other disciples never would have let him be buried. According to Jewish understanding, burial is the final signing and sealing of death. Also, in contrast to the above story, the spices were poisonous and would have killed him instead. Moreover, his weakened physical condition (after all those beatings and passion) would have prohibited such revival. Then too, if he rose later, certainly he would have been apprehended by the guards.

**3. The Hallucination Theory:** states that the agitated disciples and hysterical women wanted to see Jesus and thought that he would rise. So they imagined that they saw him. They therefore did not see what they claimed to have seen but just what they thought and wanted to see. They had hallucinations.

But the response to this: If so, how did it happen that the disciples were steeped in unbelief and would scarcely believe him after seeing him, for which Jesus rebuked them (cf. Lk. 24: 25) Think of Thomas who refused to believe without touching him. The records all indicate that this resurrected Jesus had a body. The disciples recognised his features; Mary recognised the tone of his

voice; his mannerisms; He ate fish with the disciples; He invited Thomas to examine his hands and his side.

Furthermore, if this theory is true, how can one explain the fact that the tomb was empty? If what these believers saw was only a ghost in a vision, his body would still have been in the tomb. But the tomb was empty. Jesus was not there. This is more eloquent than speech, more convincing than logic.

**4. The Mistake Theory:** states that the women made a mistake and went to an old deserted tomb, and thinking this to be the burial place of Jesus, hurried away to circulate the report that Jesus had risen. Similar explanations are those of K. Lake in “The Resurrection of Jesus”, Lake conjectured that there were several tombs and that the women misunderstood the young man who said that Jesus was not there. The man had intended to redirect them to the right place, but they read into it something more.

But the response to this is:

There is no parallel to this in all history. People do not forget a place so indelibly impressed on their minds and hearts. There is no question about the identity of Jesus’ tomb. The women, some apostles, and even the Pharisees saw to that. It was guarded carefully and sealed by men whose hatred and fear would let them take no chance of making a mistake. The facts are very clear, true and undisputed.

**5. The Earthquake Theory:** holds the view that an earthquake swallowed Jesus’ body. The response to this is: Peter and John found the linen shroud and face cloth wrapped neatly in the tomb. It would be a most considerate earthquake that would swallow the body of Jesus and neatly fold the shroud. It certainly was not the work of vandals and enemies who would wish to desecrate the body of Jesus. Such a group would never have left the tomb and linens in such a neat order. Even, how would they have entered the tomb with the seal and guard of soldiers there?

From the foregoing, it would seem that none of the alternative interpretations or attempted explanations succeed to provide a satisfactory account. They cannot be defended or sustained, even on the strength of their evidence, sequence or logic. Their weaknesses are apparent and inherent. In fact, it requires as great a miracle to explain away these facts as it demands such a miracle to accept the reality of this supernatural event.

As we read in the Easter edition of the Word Among Us, April 1999:

In the Orthodox world, there is a very beautiful tradition. When people meet each other, especially at Easter time, one person says to the other, “Christ is risen.” And immediately, the other answers, “He is truly risen.”

At the beginning of the Bolshevik Revolution, there was a public debate in a Russian city between an atheist and an Orthodox priest. The atheist speaker stood up and spoke against the resurrection of Jesus. When he was done, he stepped down convinced that his arguments could not be disputed. Then, the Orthodox priest came to the platform, looked at the crowd and said “Christ is risen.” And all at once, everyone shouted, “He is truly risen!” With that, he left the platform.

For the one who believes, no explanation is necessary.

For the one who does not believe, no explanation is possible.

### **The Uniqueness of Jesus Resurrection**

No one in the New Testament claims to have seen or witnessed the actual resurrection even, or to know what a resurrection is. This, however, is not to question whether it actually happened. Though the event itself is nowhere described, since no one saw it or had direct experience of it and could have described it literally, the resurrection of Jesus Christ including the predictions and the testimonies, represent the watershed of New Testament history and

the central point of its faith. On the historical plane it marks the division between the earthly life of Jesus and the apostolic age.

It is a unique event, and not one of a class in relation either to the expectation of other individuals or to other raisings from the dead in the biblical narrative. It has priority in time (cf. Act 26:23) and superiority in status in that it forms the first and most significant part of the series. In fact the noun ('resurrection') is never used to those other raisings. Even in the Lazarus story, it is reserved by Martha for the general resurrection at the last day (cf. John 11:24) and by Jesus for himself (cf. John 11: 25). All other men apart from Jesus are restored to life only to die again. Even those raised from the dead by Jesus and the apostles have still to die again. Their death is merely postponed. Indeed, it is often debatable how far over the boundary of death they have passed. What the language indicates is, rather, that for the Hebrew mind there was no absolute division between life and death. They are indeed dead; but in all these cases the dead person is simply called back to life, and this is indicated by the corpse's opening its eyes and sitting up (cf. Acts 9:40) or sitting up and beginning to speak (cf. Luke 7:15). Raising the dead is the continuation of healing beyond a certain point. Such is included as part of the regular mission program laid upon the twelve (cf. Matt. 10:8). The restorative power is of God, but the agents of it may be purely human.

The case is quite different in the resurrection of Jesus. Only HE is exempt from this (cf. Acts 13:34; Rom 6:9). There is no suggestion of mere resuscitation. He passed right over the border into the realm of the departed spirits. He is not brought back simply to this life, destined to die again, but raised forever to the right hand of God. This is effected, not through any human agency, but by God alone: and only of his rising does the New Testament use the term 'the resurrection'. The Resurrection of Jesus, according to St. Thomas is the efficient and exemplary cause of our resurrection.<sup>3</sup> For Karl Rahner:

The Resurrection which is referred to in the resurrection of Jesus as distinguished from the

resurrection of the dead in the Old and New Testaments means the final and definitive salvation of a concrete human existence by God and in the presence of God, the abiding and real validity of human history, which neither moves further and further into emptiness, nor perishes altogether.<sup>4</sup>

### **What kind of event is the Resurrection of Jesus?**

In the midst of all sorts of arguments and theories to explain the resurrection away as not real and factual, one can ask another meaningful question: what kind of event is the resurrection of Jesus? Is it an event or experience?

No matter what we say about it, all would agree that something clearly happened after the death of Jesus which transformed the band of shattered disciples into people who were firmly convinced that Jesus was alive and that they had a message which would transform the world. Even the historical scholar must agree that something has to have happened which suddenly awakened in all these men, who were in no way prepared for it, such a conviction that they had. The New Testament writings are unanimous that what happened was the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Such apparently divergent texts illustrate, if anything does, Heraclitus' principle: "An implicit agreement is more valuable than an explicit one."<sup>5</sup> The deep-seated harmony of these different testimonies have great weight. And it would be difficult to explain their mutual relationship by mental contagion or coincidence.

In other words, the early preachers were proclaiming an actual event, an unexpected as it was supernatural. When we see the extraordinary way in which the Church burst forth during the first centuries, we must admit that there was an explosion at the start; this explosion was the resurrection. It alone gave to the Christian missionaries the dynamism that we see in them as that time; it alone made of them, who were discouraged and sad after the passion (cf. Mk. 14:50) the martyrs and confessors of the faith who would fall by thousands, all declaring that Christ lives forever. Those who reject such are obliged to find some other explanations for the extraordinary transformation of the disciples. None of those

attempted explanations will bear critical examinations or account for the extraordinary psychological and moral change induced into so many different people and with such lasting effects in the face of those who had every reason to discredit the belief if they could. The true plausible explanation of the disciples' experiences of the appearances and the discovery of the empty tomb is the resurrection of Jesus. We cannot therefore spiritualise the resurrection and remove it from the real of historical fact. Neither can we allow Christian theology and spirituality to be shaped by the contemporary distrust of the miraculous. We cannot impose on what God has chosen to do in Jesus what we think God would have done.

This is our faith. This is the faith of the Christian Church from its beginning, proclaimed in all her doctrines, celebrated in her ceremonies and rituals and lived in the life of Christians. Different formulations of the creed and magisterial statements give complete credence to this faith.

### **Historical and Transcendent Event**

Yet our question remains: What kind of event is the resurrection of Jesus? *The New Catechism of the Catholic Church* describes the resurrection of Jesus as 'Historical and Transcendent Event'. "The mystery of Christ's resurrection is a real event, with manifestations that were historically verified, as the New Testament bears witness." (CCC. 639) "Although the Resurrection was an historical event that could be verified by the sign of the empty tomb and by the reality of the apostles' encounters with the risen Christ, still it remains at the very heart of the mystery of faith as something that transcends and surpasses history." (CCC. 647). As Pope John Paul II emphasized, the resurrection is a 'historical event' because it took place in a precise context of time and place'.<sup>6</sup>

In our ordinary sense 'historical' denotes not only what is in itself knowable by scientific observation of facts in its actual occurrence, but also what has in fact occurred. In itself we cannot concede that the resurrection of Jesus is historical in the first sense of something open to scientific investigation and verifiable by

neutral witnesses or an event that could have been photographed as it was occurring. The New Testament does not claim that anyone saw the resurrection and makes no attempt to describe it. This ineffable reality cannot be assimilated to any fact of human history which can be grasped and completely understood by applying the rules of criticism. By its nature, such an event, being at the same time a mystery of the faith, does not completely fit into any of the categories of human knowledge. It is a real event which does not come from this world, and cannot be the object of historical investigation as such.

On the other hand, the resurrection of Christ is truly historical in the sense that, while it is in itself completely meta-experiential, it is objectively signified for us by its effects - negative, like the empty tomb, or positive, like the appearances - not to mention the faith of the women and the apostles and the birth of the Church itself.

The appearances, for the disciples who were convinced that they had indeed seen him, are historical. Behind their confession of faith in the risen Lord lies the experience of having witnessed him at some time and in some way. At the same time the resurrection event, as distinct from the appearances, is above all a unique supernatural event. As such, we are reminded by Pope John Paul II that, at the same time:

It transcends and stands above history . . . No one was an eye-witness of the Resurrection. No one could say how it had happened in its physical reality. Still less could the senses perceive the most interior essence of his passage to another life. It is this tranhistorical feature of the resurrection that must be especially considered if we are to understand to some extent the mystery of that historical but also tranhistorical event.<sup>7</sup>

The resurrection of Christ is tranhistorical in the sense that it refers to an 'event' that took place on the other side of death; therefore, which lies beyond the confines of space and time. It is, as Jean Guilton said, "a trans-reality, known by trans-historical cognition; a

trans-reality, but reality; trans-historical, but based on evidence.”<sup>8</sup> History alone is not qualified to teach us about the facts of the beyond.

Similarly, the reality resulting from this event namely the reality of the risen Lord, is also a trans-historical reality in that it belongs to the end of history existing within the new (eschatological) era.

To say this, however, in no way invalidates the historicity of the appearances; it merely safeguards the other-worldly new reality of the risen Jesus. By the resurrection Jesus enters a completely new universe of being, the end-time of history, beyond the control of history and beyond the reach of historians. He rose to a new life transcending the co-ordinates of time and space and therefore not subject to the criteria of simple human empirical observation. It is true that there is an underlying identity between Jesus of history and the Christ of faith which the risen Lord invited the disciples to confirm in the appearances, the human identity hides another which is pervaded by the mystery of God. In an important article, W. Pannenberg, writing against a cavalier attitude toward the historicity of the resurrection, insists that there is no question here of a simple revivification of a corpse. Not only is there the physical fact that immediately after death irreversible process of dissolution begins but the New Testament are thinking of transforming rather than revivification. Paul, who draws a close analogy between the resurrection of Jesus and the future resurrection of the dead (1 Cor. 15:12), stresses heavily the characteristics of the transformation that takes place in the resurrection. What dies was perishable, weak, and mortal; what rises is imperishable, glorious, and immortal (1 Cor. 15: 42 - 43; 52 - 54). In short, “it is sown a physical body; it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15: 44). It was, rather than a return to his previous style of earthly existence, what the Church has always referred to as a glorious resurrection. His body is endowed with special properties since it now shares in the glory which his soul had from the first instance of the Incarnation. He appears as the same and yet different; a ‘transformed’ Christ.

So we cannot speak of Jesus' resurrection as a process of revivification or resuscitation. His resurrection is not a "coming back" to life, but a "going beyond" to a totally new and different kind of life. Stressing the change and the transformation and the newness of the risen body, so that resurrection cannot be understood as the old body coming back to life, St Paul, writing to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:35-36) said: "What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it raise in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body." Then he tells them a "mystery": "We shall all be changed. ... For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality" (15:51-53). Thus there is both continuity and discontinuity between the old and the new. It was the same Jesus of Nazareth who was raised from the dead, but he has been changed and transformed. We cannot know in any literal way what a resurrection is. We can only speak of it only in imperfect and inadequate metaphors or analogies. We must say with St Paul that the risen body of Jesus is not like the physical body that we know in its earthly existence. John Navone clarifies further:

Resurrection is in some sense a continuation of the life that existed in history, and this is the point of the continuity between the old and the new. But it is not an historical continuation of this life, for eternity or the eschaton is not history extended indefinitely. Risen life is a new kind of life and a new kind of existence involving a total change and transformation of the old, and this is the equally important point of discontinuity that Paul stresses.

It would be more proper to speak of the resurrection as an eschatological event rather than as an historical event. Eschatological existence is not simply a continuation of history, it is not history extended and continued indefinitely. It is rather the culmination of history, the passage of the historical into a new and final mode of existence.<sup>9</sup>

### **Trinitarian Act**

Also the Resurrection of Jesus was a **Trinitarian act**, accomplished by the one act of the three persons of the Blessed Trinity. *The New Catechism of the Catholic Church* illustrates this well in Nos. 648 - 650.

648 Christ's Resurrection is an object of faith in that it is a transcendent intervention of God himself in creation and history. In it the three divine persons act together as one, and manifest their own proper characteristics. The Father's power "raised up" Christ his Son and by doing so perfectly introduced his Son's humanity, including his body, into the Trinity. Jesus is conclusively revealed as "Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his Resurrection from the dead." St. Paul insists on the manifestation of God's power through the working of the Spirit who gave life to Jesus' dead humanity and called it to the glorious state of Lordship.

649 As for the Son, he effects his own Resurrection by virtue of his divine power. Jesus announces that the Son of man will have to suffer much, die, and then rise. Elsewhere he affirms explicitly: "I lay down my life, that I may take it again... I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again." "We believe that Jesus died and rose again."

650 The Fathers contemplate the Resurrection from the perspective of the divine person of Christ who remained united to his soul and body, even when these were separated from each other by death: "By the unity of the divine nature, which remains present in each of the two components of man, these are reunited. For as death

is produced by the separation of the human components, so Resurrection is achieved by the union of the two.”

As John Navone explains:

Belief in the resurrection is not the same as believing in the immortality of the soul. There was nothing automatic about the resurrection, that is, it was not the automatic survival of the spiritual part of a man or of the soul. God raised Jesus from the dead, not his soul, but the whole Jesus in his total existence. It was the whole of Jesus of Nazareth who was changed and transformed into new life and existence. The whole Jesus had to die and be raised from the dead, transformed into what Paul calls “spiritual” existence.<sup>10</sup>

### **Meaning and Implications of Jesus Resurrection**

The consequences of the Resurrection are far-reaching and have the utmost significance in Christ and in the history of Christianity.

#### **For Jesus**

From the gospel narratives two characteristic reactions to Jesus are evident to us: the one before the Resurrection the other after it. There was a deepening of the evaluation made of Him before. This would not have been so if a change had not taken place in Jesus.

#### **a. “Lord”, “Son of God”, “Christ”**

Henceforth certain titles were to stand out in the minds of those who believed in Jesus: “Our Lord”, “True Son of God”, “Christ”. These titles given to Jesus at Easter evoke a new messianic reality. The Resurrection proved his claims and vindicated the character of Jesus.

The characteristic title of the risen Christ - Lord - was given to Jesus with the same meaning it had when applied to God (Cf. Phil. 2:9; Jn. 20:28.) in the fullness of His sovereignty. It is the Resurrection that has established Jesus in his Lordship (Cf. Acts 2:24-36; Mt. 28:18). Many apologetic writers have presented the

Resurrection exclusively as the convincing demonstration of the claims of Jesus or of His divinity. Therein the full and profound significance of His earthly life is fully revealed. In Lohfink's erudite words, it was exactly through the Resurrection that "the man Jesus was shown to be 'the one' through whom God had definitively and unsurpassably revealed Himself; and in whom He had acted in a definitive and unsurpassable way".<sup>11</sup>

It is the Resurrection, for the earliest Christian preaching, that designates Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God (Cf. Acts 2: 36; Rom. 1:4.). This is the point at which his resignation as Messiah begins, when so far from returning to the confines of the present age, he enters upon and inaugurates the age of glory. At the hour when Jesus is glorified, (Cf. Lk. 24:26; Jn. 12:23; 1 Pet. 1:21) God's messianic act is complete and the age to come has begun to supersede this one. And conversely, it is because in it Jesus is declared unequivocally to be the Messiah that the raising of Jesus can be spoken of as "the resurrection - as the beginning of the last day.

**b. Vindication of Jesus by God**

Another important aspect of the resurrection is the way in which it links the person and work of Christ. The Resurrection above all constitutes the confirmation of all Christ's works and teachings. This is its Christological significance. The Resurrection expresses God's satisfaction with what Christ has done. It is the seal the Father put on the life, the death, the words, and the deeds of his Son, Jesus Christ. The act of Resurrection is always an act of God, although Jesus claimed the power to take up his life again after laying it down, (Cf. Jn. 10:18) the New Testament does not suggest that the Resurrection was an independent act of Jesus Christ. The power behind it was the power of God. Indeed, the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is viewed as the supreme display of divine power. It is an all-encompassing action of God in the history of humankind. The constant New Testament emphasis is not simply that Christ has risen, but that God has raised him or that he has been raised, not from the underworld back to earth, but up to heaven. The exaltation of the

person is the vindication of his mission. It is as His son that God raised Jesus from death. If Christ had not been raised there would have been no certainty that his death had effected anything. Man would, as St. Paul says, still be in his sins. The Resurrection is seen, therefore, to be indispensable to man's salvation. His exalted position has a direct bearing on his present activity. His capacity for effectively acting on behalf of his people in his continued ministry is as unlimited as his sovereignty. Hence the Epistle to the Hebrews drew from its study of the Resurrection the title "Eternal High Priest" and assigned it to Christ.

**c. Completion of Redemption**

The Resurrection is essentially part of God's plan for the redemption of mankind. In fact, it demonstrates the completion of redemption. It is the salvific event par-excellence. Jesus died to save the world. Had he remained permanently in the state of death he could not have redeemed the world. Had he not come from the grave no gospel message would have been given to the world. The work of redemption was completed in the Resurrection. Death plus the Resurrection equals perfected redemption. It was by being raised to anew life, not less than by dying to this old existence, that Christ now presents the picture of man-redeemed, or as St. Paul states it "the redemption in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is central within the whole act whereby we are saved. Isolated from the earlier life of Jesus, the Resurrection becomes something unnatural and nothing more. However related to the whole gospel of the deeds and teaching of Christ, the Resurrection is seen to be its crowning point. This aspect is developed in the papal discourses:

Christ's Resurrection is closely connected with the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. It is its fulfillment, according to God's eternal plan. Rather, it is the supreme crowning of all that Jesus had revealed and wrought throughout his whole life, from his birth to his passion and death, by his deeds, miracles, teaching, example of perfect holiness and above all by his transfiguration. He had never

revealed directly the glory, which he had with the Father 'before the world was made' but he concealed this glory in his humanity until the definitive emptying of himself through his death on the cross.<sup>12</sup>

The Resurrection is a saving event because it is not until Jesus has received the fullness of life, which is properly His as Son of God and Son of Man that his redemptive work is complete and effective. He is the first-born of those who rise (Cf. Col. 1:18.), "the first-born of all creation" (Col. 1:15), the germinal cell of the New world and the figure of it in its final form, "the Alpha and the Omega" (Apoc. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13). Jesus is the second Adam, the true Adam (Cf. Rom. 5:12-21). The saving effect of the Resurrection that Jesus communicates a new life to those who believe in Him.

**d. Fulfillment of Prophecy**

The Resurrection is the fulfillment of Christ's own prophecies and as such, is the most sublime proof of his divinity. As Pope John Paul II points out, "the Resurrection of the Crucified proved that he was really the 'I AM', the Son of God."<sup>13</sup> Christ had referred on a number of occasions to the glory that would be manifested in his death and resurrection as the eternal Son of the Father (Cf. Jn. 2:19-22; 11:4; Phil. 2:9-11). This doctrine was subsequently expounded by St. Paul as the high point of Revelation in the way he based his evidence of the Resurrection on the evidence of Scriptures. The announcement of the death and the Resurrection of the Son of Man (Cf. Mk. 9:34; 10:32-34) pertains to the preaching of the eschatological kingdom. It means that it is through death and then in a Resurrection that Jesus will enter into the glory of the kingdom (Cf. Lk. 24:26). Jesus thus fulfills the prophecy of Daniel chapter 7 on the heavenly coming of the Son of Man through that of the suffering servant. Thus, theologically, we may conclude that the coming of the kingdom in which is the eschatological fullness of salvation is identical with the mystery of the Resurrection.

**e. Victory over Death**

The first Christians did not just say that Jesus lived beyond death. They said that he overcome (conquered) death (Cf. Acts 2:24). The Resurrection of Jesus meant that the kingdom of God, which was present in Jesus, had also conquered death. The Messiah had risen. The reign of God had come 'with power'. Christ has conquered sin and death and has promised us that we shall conquer it too. This Easter Mystery is one that throws a continuous challenge to us to rise above the fear of our precarious, tenuous and finite existence here on earth. Our belief in Christ's Resurrection is a radical expression of man's conviction that no matter what happens, good and godliness will triumph over evil in the end. Hence, with the risen Christ, we can triumphantly say, "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" (1 Cor. 15:55). C. F. Gellert rightly wrote:

Jesus lives! thy terrors now can, O death no more  
appaul us. Jesus lives! By this we know Thou O  
grace cannot enthrall us Halleluia! The powers of  
death have done their worst. But Christ their legions  
hath dispersed. Let shouts of holy joy outburst:  
Halleluia! <sup>14</sup>

The victory of our Lord Jesus Christ is one we can share. The Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, reminds us that the definitive victory over death, already won by Christ, is shared by him with humanity in the measure in which we receive the fruits of redemption, bringing with it admission to the "new life".<sup>15</sup> The importance of Jesus' victory over death is the Christian mystery that underlies resurrection language. This sharing with humanity leads us to examine as well the theological implications of Jesus' Resurrection in all men.

**For All People**

Apart from being the culminating point of Revelation, the Resurrection has a number of consequences, which affect us directly. What Jesus is in virtue of his resurrection, he is in relation to man and creation. Far from Him alone being affected by his resurrection,

all men and women are affected. As the Second Vatican Council emphasized:

All this holds true not for Christians only but also for all men of goodwill in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God in the paschal mystery.<sup>16</sup>

**a. Gift and Union with the Life of Christ**

In the first place, Jesus' Resurrection is also seen by the New Testament, in addition to its application to Christ, as the moment when Christ "opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers" and inaugurated the "new and living way" (Heb. 10:20) between man and God. The Risen Christ is the principle and source of a new life for all men since he makes available to us a sharing in the divine life of grace and in that victory over death caused by sin (Cf. Eph. 2:4-5). The Resurrection is the point of release, when the "life" that Jesus came to bring (Cf. Jn. 10:10) is poured forth in power and let loose in the entire world. This new life is characterized in a special way by our becoming adopted children of God (Cf. Gal. 4:4-5; Rom. 8:14) as a result of being freed from the slavery of sin. The grace of adoptive sonship or divine filiations makes us brothers and sisters of Christ. Jesus is restored to his friends, never again to be parted from them. He lives with and in his people. This vital union of the believer with Christ becomes more precious after the Resurrection. The believer is risen with Christ and Christian life is the outliving of the in living Christ (Cf. Gal. 2:20). This restoration is not a mere human reunion but a permanent divine indwelling (Cf. Jn. 14:23). Salvation is realized in Christ alone, with whom it is identified. Thus the Resurrection that brought about salvation in Christ also puts this salvation at the disposal of men. Men will not be saved except by communion with Christ in this salvation.

**b. Pledge and Principle of our own Resurrection**

Another effect of Christ's Resurrection is its causal relationship with our own Resurrection. Pope John Paul II thus writes:

When he foretold the institution of the Eucharist, Jesus referred to himself as the sacrament of eternal life and of the future Resurrection: 'He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day'.<sup>17</sup>

We derive our title and hope for bodily immortality our supernatural union with him by faith in his divinity and by partaking of his life-giving flesh. Scheeben makes a penetration comment on this point:

'The flesh of the Lord is life-giving Spirit' says St. Athanasius, 'because it was conceived by the life-giving Spirit'. Thus the Spirit of God abides in it and the son of God, from whom the Spirit proceeds, has taken it to himself as a fire takes iron. This indwelling spirit did not, it is true, actually preserve it from death, but guarded it from dissolution and decay; and once death had embraced it, the Spirit called it back, in a way that was all the more miraculous, in a new, immortal life. This same Spirit brings the flesh of Christ, as the organ of his Spiritual might, upon the altar, there to unite it to the flesh of the faithful.<sup>18</sup>

For St. Paul, too, the strongest argument for our Resurrection is that Christ, the God-man, one head, has risen from the dead by the power of his divinity (Cf. Eph. 2:5; Col. 2:12; Rom. 8:11). Since the best way of bringing about this union is to partake of the life-giving flesh of Christ, the Fathers point to the Eucharist as the primary source and chief title of our immortality and the Resurrection of the body. That Christ is risen from the dead, and that through communion with him in the Eucharist we already participate in this new life of Christ in a very real way is the key to our own bodies on the last day. The resurrection of Christ is our inheritance as well. In view of the

finality and banality of human mortality, and more so of its frequency in nations like ours where both life-saving and prolonging devices are in short supply, the hope and purpose of life to be reposed in the Resurrected Jesus becomes the more urgent. It is this resurrected Jesus who transforms and explains the meaning of human existence and materiality in all its ramifications.

The Resurrection of Jesus, therefore, is the principle of the Resurrection of the Christian to the eternal life of glory. Only because God has done this for His Son are new possibilities opened for His many children who have come to believe in what He has done. The Father who raised Jesus will also raise the Christian (Cf. 2 Cor. 4:14). Nowhere is this theme more fully elaborated than in 1 Corinthians 15. The risen Christ is at once the prototype of redemption and the effective cause of the Resurrection of all other men (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:20f; Col. 1:18). He is the first to return from the dead. What takes place in him will take place in all. So closely bound together are Christ's Resurrection and that of the Christian, it must be said that if the Christian will not rise from the dead, then Christ is not risen (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:13) and mankind is not saved. Salvation means union with the risen Lord and through him peace with God and between all men, and this is meant not merely in a spiritual sense but in a real, corporeal sense. The Resurrection of the faithful completes the victory of Christ over sin and death. The Resurrection is not a return to the conditions of the present life, but to a life of the spirit, the life already possessed by the risen Jesus and communicated from him to those who believe in Him. What the Resurrection or man in Christ means is not only a deliverance from physical death into eternal life. It also means – and this is in some ways more primary – the here-and-now deliverance of man from spiritual death into a life lived in Christ and in consciousness of the power of his Resurrection. According to the apostle, we shall share in Christ's Resurrection principally for the reason that the divine, life-giving Spirit of Christ and His Eternal Father abides in us, the living members of Christ (Cf. Rom. 8:11).

**c. Gift of the Spirit**

This last passage again draws attention to the Holy Spirit as the vital link, not only between Christ's Resurrection and ours, but also between our present and our future state. That "What is mortal" will be swallowed up by life is even now guaranteed by the gift of the Spirit (Cf. 2 Cor. 5:4-5). For Christ "will change our newly body to be like his glorious body, by the power, which enable him to subject all things to himself (Phil. 3:21); and this power is the Spirit". Indeed, the Spirit, the principle of the new life of the Christian, is not given until Jesus is raised and glorified (Cf. Jn. 7:39; 16:7), and the first thing the risen Lord did when he appeared to the disciples behind locked doors is to breathe the Holy Spirit upon them (Cf. Jn. 20:19-23). In fact St. Paul regards the giving of the Spirit as the characteristic activity of the risen Christ (Cf. 1 Cor. 15:45). He is raised by the Spirit, is transformed by the Spirit and becomes source of the Spirit for the Christian. It is arguable that it is at the Resurrection that the Holy Spirit enters history and the Christian Church is established as the new people of God. St. Paul also identifies the Spirit's operation within the Christian with that of the risen Christ. Our very bodies are given life through the Spirit, which now possesses us (Cf. Rom. 8:11). The very same Spirit who gave assurance to Jesus can assure us in the midst of our struggles and problems and even in the face of death itself. It is the Spirit who gives us confidence that we too will rise, not only as individuals, but as the whole and perfect body of Christ. The process by which we are "transformed" ultimately to be "conformed" to the body of his glory (Cf. Phil. 3:21) is but the same process by which Christ himself is formed in us. And this begins at Baptism where, by incorporation into the body of Christ, we come to "belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead" (Cf. Rom. 7:4). By such language St. Paul relates the risen life at present known in Christ to the Resurrection yet to come. The agent of this continuity through change is, from the divine side, the Spirit; the vehicle, from the human side, is the Body.

### **Caveat**

Where then does the mystery of the Resurrection stand in the work of Redemption? What is its role and its aftermath in the life and mission of the Church? What is the relevance of all this to our life as Christians? Of what significance is it to us today as Christians?

Faith in the resurrection is something that has such a deep effect on life and has such profound repercussions on all that we do that it cannot be dependent on a few shaky arguments that not everyone accepts. It must have a more solid basis. Faith in the resurrection holds two poles together very firm; one in the past, and the other in the future. What about the present? Is there a wire that connects one pole to the other and, as it passes through the present, lights up the lamp of life, lets us see the road surface and starts the engine of existence? What use do people who are alive today make of their faith in the resurrection in their lives? Is there any resurrection in their lives? For most of us Christians today, to all intents and purposes the resurrection has little to do with our lives here and now. It is one of those difficult mysteries of the faith, hidden in the wake of the past and the future, that we're not very sure what to do with in everyday life.

For the first Christians, faith in the resurrection was the necessary condition for talking about the life that sprang from the resurrection. Faith in the resurrection was the environment within which they lived and out of which they spoke. It was like the air they breathed. Both those who talked about the resurrection and those who listened to them lived within this new environment. Faith in the resurrection was the root of everything, just as the life we have is the root of everything we do in life.

There are two very different ways of approaching and living the same truth of faith. Today we situate the object of faith in the resurrection in the past and in the future. The first Christians situated it in the present. The way the New Testament talks about the resurrection contains many elements that can help us to rethink our way of seeing and living the resurrection.

To believe in the resurrection is not just to accept a fact from the past and another in the future, but is, first and foremost, an attitude to life arising out of the discovery of a friend, alive in our lives, thanks to the power of God. Believing in the resurrection, therefore, is believing, not in a thing, not in arguments, but in Someone who acts in us and through us, with immense power, capable of bringing life out of death and making old things new, guiding us toward a future of vast dimensions and possibilities.

The key point to faith in the resurrection is that we should discover in our lives this ever-present power of God who is a God of the living. Only in this way will we too rise and, once risen, realise the scope of faith in the resurrection. The scientific arguments will not give faith in the resurrection its importance, but the lived experience of the resurrection will give importance to the arguments we discover to defend it. Our faith in the resurrection of Jesus is not out of human reason alone but reliance on God's power at work in Jesus. The power of God is great. His ability is certain. His faithfulness is sure. His promises never fail. He has promised and he will never fail. We stand on the unconquerable rock of our maker. The only truly convincing proof of the resurrection is life that rises again and is renewed today, that overcomes the powers of death today and enables the repressed and shackled powers of life to be discovered and released to give us all happiness and hope. This is the proof that there is a power stronger than death acting in human beings, the power of the risen Christ. Where are these signs of the resurrection in our lives to give backing to our words about the resurrection? This is the almighty question we need to search for and answer during this Easter season.

### **Conclusion**

Christ's Resurrection occupies, as asserted in credal statements, an essential part of Christian faith. It is, as Pope John Paul II says, "the greatest event in the history of salvation and indeed, we can say in the history of humanity, since it gives definitive meaning to the world".<sup>19</sup> Things can never be the same again. On this great event of Good News revolves time and eternity. It completes the revelation of God, who has been trying, since the time of Abraham,

to make Himself known to us. It is the supreme “Epiphany”, for in the risen Jesus we have, as John says, seen the “Glory” of God (Cf. 1 Jn. 4:15; 5). At the same time we have the pledge and the first realization of the final state to which the whole human history and with it the whole creation must attain. As found in the Easter preface II “His Resurrection is our rising to life”.

However this consequence of the Resurrection is not just automatic. Each one of us must make room for the risen Christ in our thoughts, words and deeds. The faith in the Resurrection of Jesus should have a great influence in our everyday life. If we do not die with Him, then we cannot return to life with Him (Cf. Rom. 6:5-11; 2 Tim. 2:11). The sacraments of the Church, especially Baptism and the Eucharist, incorporate us with the risen Christ, make us become the physical body (people) of the risen Christ. That participation in the new life of the risen Christ, however, must, if it is to be authentic, be reflected in an external apostolic dynamic, as it was in the lives of the disciples in the post-paschal period. The Christian people of every generation have the responsibility to continue this task. As John Paul II points out:

Every Christian in every age and place is a witness to the risen Christ. He sees with the eyes of Peter and the apostles; he is convinced of the glorious Resurrection Christ crucified and therefore believes completely in him who is the Way, the Truth, the Life and the Light of the world, and proclaims him with a serene courage. The ‘Paschal Witness’ is thus the specific characteristic of the Christian.<sup>20</sup>

To be credible witnesses of the Resurrection, the Pope says that our lives must be characterized by three elements:

- (a) Clarity of Doctrine;
- (b) Ascetic Struggle and Consistency of Behaviour;
- (c) Apostolic Commitment.<sup>21</sup>

This is life-long program. It is in fact the Christian response to that call to holiness, which was articulated so eloquently by the Second Vatican Council.<sup>22</sup> This also has been explicated in practical detail in the Papal document on the vocation and mission of the laity.<sup>23</sup> However in fidelity to proclaiming the bodily Resurrection of Jesus, we should never become so defensively governed by apologetics that we do not do justice to the element of transformation and mystery in the risen state (glorified) of Christ.

On the final note, the call to give witness to the paschal events is not an invitation to an optional commitment. The words of the Risen Christ, “Go therefore into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole of creation” (Mark 16:15), have an imperative ring about them. This is one of the most abiding and onerous duties given to the pilgrim Church. It is an immortal tradition for every generation of Christians. This unchanging nature of Christ’s injunction, however, does not affect the means of realizing in concrete its requirements. The Church would not be faithful to her own identity and vocation, did she not heed the urgent command to bring the Good News to all people. In fact the Church cannot avoid this divine commission without doing violence to herself. Thus as Rev. Fr. (Dr.) John K. A. Aniagwu wrote: “Evangelization belongs to the very essence of the Church; so that the Church can only be Church if she evangelizes. If the Church were ever to cease to evangelize, then she would cease to be the Church, at least the Church founded by Christ.”<sup>24</sup> Hence the necessity and relevance of a new era of evangelization worldwide to revive methods, to seek every means by which we can bring the Christian message to modern man. Such a Christian message and mission rested heavily on the Resurrection as its essential instrument just as it was in the lives of the disciples in the post-paschal period. Without the Resurrection of Jesus there would have been no message. Christians today, as ever before, have no message more central or more important to give to mankind. Therefore the Resurrection is of central importance in the Mystery of Redemption and is at the very heart and seal of Christian Faith - a living faith.

Above all, the resurrection is the seed of our hope. To believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is to believe as well in the

possibility and reality of change in one's life. What happened in the life of Jesus can and will surely be brought about again in the life of his followers who truly believe in him as the Resurrection and the Life. Jesus resurrection life is not a promise that will only be fulfilled in some future existence. This life is available to us here and now even as we await its complete fulfillment at the end of time.

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