

The Resurrection of Our Lord, Easter Day
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+ Jesu juva +

ANSWERING THE FOOLS

Mark 16:1-8; I Corinthians 15:51-57; Job 19:23-27

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

They call us fools for keeping this Holy Feast. Oh they're fine with Easter bunnies, and dying eggs, and giving baskets filled with candies, and the renewal of Spring (though that doesn't really work around here it seems); but the resurrection of Christ? Only a fool could believe such a thing, they say. And even many churches have joined them in their unbelief, teaching that the resurrection is more of spiritual concept than a historic reality, a myth meant to teach us something about renewal and living a better life, or maybe the triumph of good over evil.

The women who went to the tomb that first Easter morning went away trembling in fear and amazed at what they had seen and heard. They had gone there expecting to find a sealed tomb. But it was no longer sealed. The great stone blocking the entrance had been rolled away. And entering the mysteriously opened tomb they encounter an angel who says



to them "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him." They were shaking and beside themselves Mark tells us, but they were not incredulous. They believed what they had seen and heard.

The angel also told them: "But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you." According to Matthew they ran to do this, not only shaking and afraid, but full of joy. But Mary Magdalene, evidently lingered behind, for both Mark and John report that Jesus appeared to her first. And as the other women rush to tell the disciples, Jesus Himself meets on the way and repeats the angel's instructions, saying: "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me."

But when Mary Magdalene and the other women report these things to the disciples their reaction is not rejoicing, but unbelief. According to St. Luke, "their words seemed to them like idle tales, and they did not believe them." Foolish it seems to them. Yet Peter and John go to see for themselves and also find the tomb open and empty.

That same day two of Jesus followers (but not the apostles) are on their way to Emmaus and Jesus appears to them, but they do not recognize Him. They recount for Him His crucifixion and death and confess their dashed hopes and the fact that though these women said that they had seen Him and that He was risen from the dead, they didn't believe it.

Jesus answered them: "'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?'" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." It was not those who believed and confessed His resurrection who were the fools. It was those who had refused to believe it.

And the same is true today.

Now St. Paul admits that if the Christian Church is wrong and Christ Jesus did not rise from the dead that "your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" and, that "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable." For without the resurrection of Jesus nothing about the Faith really matters. Your sins would not be forgiven for Christ's death would be nothing more than an ordinary death if He had not risen again. You could throw away the words of the prophets, for they would have prophesied lies. You could discount the words of the apostles, for, as St. Paul says, they would be "false witnesses of God, because [they] have testified of God that He raised up Christ." And you could forget about Jesus Himself, for He would be either crazy or a wicked charlatan, claiming to have been the Son of God when in fact He would only have been a man, another false messiah gathering followers to his own personal cult.

But Christ is risen from the dead. From that very day people have tried to explain away the empty tomb, but no one has been able to do so. Their explanations have all proven illogical and ridiculous. The disciples who witnessed Jesus alive again after that Easter morning are unanimous in their eye-witness testimony, never wavering throughout their whole lives, though they each go their own way in the world the story never changes. Though they are tortured, burned, boiled in oil, scourged, stoned, crucified upright, crucified upside down, clubbed to death, speared, and beheaded, they never wavered on the truth of the resurrection or the Gospel they preached, even preaching it while dying. And they were not the only eyewitnesses. According to St. Paul Jesus showed Himself alive to over 500 people. And St. Paul, the former persecutor and murderer of Christians, Himself encounters the resurrected and ascended Christ and becomes not just another Christian, but the hardest working witness

to the truth the Church has probably ever known. The resurrection is not just some spiritual idea, but is an actual event witnessed by many and well attested historically.

A fool continues in his way even when he has been shown that it is false. So who is the fool here? And so we confess boldly with the prophet Job, "I know that My Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last upon the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes behold..." And we say with all true Christians that Christ Jesus rose again, according to the Scriptures, which means not merely that the Bible tells me so, but rather that the prophetic Scriptures of the Old Testament said He would rise, and He did rise just as they had said.

And this resurrection the world calls foolishness means that we will also rise. For Christ, according to St. Paul is "the power of God and the wisdom of God;" and because He has overcome His grave, He will also overcome our graves. And as He has arisen incorruptible, so also we will be raised incorruptible. "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?" Death has no victory, no sting. The grave has no power. Because Christ has utterly disarmed them and stripped them of their power.

This world will always have the foolish who deny these realities. But you, O Christian, are not to be counted a fool. For your faith is not in idle tales or myths, but, as I have said, in realities: the realities of the incarnation of the Son of God, His substitutionary death, His physical resurrection from the dead, His bodily ascension, and His grace poured out from heaven through His Church. Let us, like the women who came to the tomb, like the apostles once they were converted, like those 500 witnesses who saw Him alive, hold fast our confession and our hope. And let us keep this Feast of Feasts, this Most Holy Day, with joy. For Christ has given us His victory. Amen.

+ Soli Deo gloria +