The Timelessness of Glory

April 12th, 2020

Easter Sunday

Christ is risen! With these three words, the history of the world and the very nature of time and the universe were forever changed. In the Gospel of John, the appearance of the Risen Christ is preceded by the evidence of what is left behind, a discarded cocoon—Mary sees the opened tomb, Peter and the other disciple see linen wrapping lying there without a corpse. The other disciple believes, but they do not understand (John 20:1-10). The path to recognition of the resurrection first passes through the shadow of uncertainty. Not comprehending, the disciples return to their own cocoons of grief and unbelief.

Our lives are cocoons right now. Most of us are in lockdown or some type of relaxed quarantine, practicing self-isolation and social distancing. All of us have been invited into a strange type of monastic life, the monotony of working from home, of being unemployed at home, of staring at the walls, of walking around our narrow worlds and thinking our narrow thoughts about the great big world beyond our windows. While this is hopefully a temporary circumstance, perhaps it is somewhat analogous to how we have been living spiritually and existentially all along till now. Most of us have been cocooned in our ideologies, our ontologies, our infirmities, our obsessions, our sins, and our weaknesses. Most of us live in an ahistorical, ascriptural and amoral cocoon that has detached us from the deep reality that is found in God. Though we think that we are already butterflies, often we are all very much wrapped up in ourselves, wrapped up in the buffered self, in the disenchanted worldview, wrapped up in mortality and solitude and decay, like Lazarus wrapped in his cocoon of shrouds. The gospels tell us that the cocoon is but temporary; that coming to Christ bestows the promise and hope of breaking forth from this cocoon into the radiance of flight, of soaring into the light like shimmering butterflies on the wing. As Alexander Pope says, “Hope springs eternal in the human breast; Man never Is, but always To be blest. The soul, uneasy, and confin'd from home, Rests and expatiates in a life to come” (Alexander Pope, *The Essay on Man*).

The gospels are full of miracles. They bear witness that Jesus is the Son of God. All of the miracles prepared the apostles and other followers for the greatest miracle of all—the resurrection of their Lord. And all of the miracles speak of this resurrection in the sense that after every healing, there is a new life. The leper exits the cocoon of uncleanliness, decay and loneliness to enter the joy of returning to society and finding God (Mark 1:40-45). The demoniac emerges from the cocoon of the tombs to live in his right mind and return to his family (Mark 5:1-20). The woman who has bled for twelve years emerges from a cocoon of shame, suffering and financial loss into a life of better prospects, confidence, and health (Mark 5:21-43). The man who was born blind emerges from the cocoon of darkness into the gift of sight and of seeing his Saviour Jesus (John 9). The paralytic breaks forth from the cocoon of immobility and guilt to enter forgiveness and the freedom of walking (Mark 2:1-12). The woman with a curved spine is straightened up; she emerges from her infirmity into a new life of praising God (Luke 13:10-13). Lazarus emerges from the cocoon of his tomb to encounter his best friend in a new way and to live in the hope of resurrection (John 11). Mary Magdalene emerges from a cocoon of deep grief and loss to find her blessed Teacher once again. As it says, “Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher)” (John 20:11-16). One by one, the miracles direct us to hope in new lives, in new paths, in a new relationship with our Lord and Saviour Jesus.

There will be hope for us beyond our cocoons of quarantine, our natural-born cocoons of inward-turning, our spiritual and existential cocoons of sin and death. Quarantine has cleared the waters of the canals of Venice, and there have been numerous photographs online of the clearing skies thanks to the reduced consumption of energy. There is a growing sense of solidarity throughout the world—there have been numerous photographs of people cheering health care workers from their balconies, of playing music across the canyons of city streets to entertain and cheer one another. Within the dark shadow of death, the light of love has blossomed. And for many in the worst-stricken zones, the plague has renewed faith in our life to come, the real life we live with God face to face beyond this transient, temporary abode, beyond in eternity. Correspondents from Bologna and Rome recently posted the following news: “A rosary slung over his shoulder, a smile visible beneath the transparent respirator strapped to his face, Father Cirillo Longo raised both fists above his head in a gesture of celebration as if he had just scored a goal. ‘See you on the other side, in paradise,’ the 95-year-old said in his last telephone call before passing away in the northern Italian city of Bergamo last month, shortly after the picture was taken.” (Andrea Vogt and Nick Squires, “Italy’s priests pay the ultimate price to comfort dying coronavirus victims”, *The Telegraph,* April 5th, 2020). The last cocoon has been shed; the faithful follower of Christ soars into true freedom and joy with his Saviour.

The miracle of the resurrection strikes at the core of our lives, at the deepest recesses of our hearts and minds. Can God make a tombstone that he cannot move? Can God make a tombstone that he cannot move, and then move it anyway? Was there not a time when God was not flesh? Was there not a time when the timeless did not know time? Was it not in the incarnation, passion and resurrection that God created and experienced something new—not just to humanity, but to Himself? That God shared this treasure of newness with us? Is not the very mystery of newness found entirely in Christ Himself? And did Christ not find new life, not only in His glorious resurrection, but also in the resurrection life shared out with all of the apostles and the faithful, all who carried the Holy Spirit in their hearts, who carry God in their lives today? It is easy to forget that the resurrection was *new* for Jesus, as new as it was for Mary Magdalene! Jesus had never died before; God had never died before. And thus, Jesus, fully God and fully human, had never been raised before, either. And by undertaking this new phenomenon, this miracle of miracles, Jesus shared with us a hope that shatters everything we know about time, about matter, about life itself. In Revelation, we read these precious words: “And he who was seated on the throne said, ‘Behold, I am making all things new.’” (Revelation 21:5).

In the gospel of John, it says: “Jesus said to her, ‘Mary!’ She turned and said to him in Hebrew, ‘Rabbouni!’ (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, ‘Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” ’ Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her.” (John 20:11-18). Why does Jesus tell her not to cling to him? Because this is not the end, either. It is not an apparition or a ghost; a fleeting vision that will disappear. It is not another cocoon of wishful thinking. It is only the beginning, and this newness is to be shared, for Jesus is ascending to “my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.” Clinging is that action of fear—the fear of the transient, the fear of losing, the fear of death. Instead, Jesus invites Mary to be open to this new life, to run off and share the good news, to be his witness of the timelessness of his glory made manifest, the true picture of hope for all humanity. And thus, Mary returns to her friends, and proclaims: “I have seen the Lord.” And once again, someday, we also shall joyously proclaim “We have seen the Lord!” for behold, Christ is risen! And the Risen Lord has made all things new.

Benediction (Paschal Homily of St. John Chrysostom)

If anyone is devout and a lover of God, let them enjoy this beautiful and radiant festival.

If anyone is a grateful servant, let them, rejoicing, enter into the joy of his Lord.

If anyone has wearied themselves in fasting, let them now receive recompense.

If anyone has labored from the first hour, let them today receive the just reward.

If anyone has come at the third hour, with thanksgiving let them feast.

If anyone has arrived at the sixth hour, let them have no misgivings; for they shall suffer no loss.

If anyone has delayed until the ninth hour, let them draw near without hesitation.

If anyone has arrived even at the eleventh hour, let them not fear on account of tardiness.

For the Master is gracious and receives the last even as the first; He gives rest to him that comes at the eleventh hour, just as to him who has labored from the first.

He has mercy upon the last and cares for the first; to the one He gives, and to the other He is gracious.

He both honors the work and praises the intention.

Enter all of you, therefore, into the joy of our Lord, and, whether first or last, receive your reward.

O rich and poor, one with another, dance for joy!

O you ascetics and you negligent, celebrate the day!

You that have fasted and you that have disregarded the fast, rejoice today!

The table is rich-laden: feast royally, all of you!

The calf is fatted: let no one go forth hungry!

Let all partake of the feast of faith. Let all receive the riches of goodness.

Let no one lament their poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed.

Let no one mourn their transgressions, for pardon has dawned from the grave.

Let no one fear death, for the Saviour's death has set us free.

He that was taken by death has annihilated it!

He descended into Hades and took Hades captive!

He embittered it when it tasted His flesh! And anticipating this, Isaiah exclaimed: "Hades was embittered when it encountered Thee in the lower regions".

It was embittered, for it was abolished!

It was embittered, for it was mocked!

It was embittered, for it was purged!

It was embittered, for it was despoiled!

It was embittered, for it was bound in chains!

It took a body and came upon God!

It took earth and encountered Ηeaven!

It took what it saw, but crumbled before what it had not seen!

O death, where is thy sting?

O Hades, where is thy victory?

Christ is risen, and you are overthrown!

Christ is risen, and the demons are fallen!

Christ is risen, and the angels rejoice!

Christ is risen, and life reigns!

Christ is risen, and not one dead remains in a tomb!

For Christ, being raised from the dead, has become the First-fruits of them that have slept.

To Him be glory and might unto the ages of ages.

Amen.