

April 12, 2009

Easter Sunday - Cycle B

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The Lord is Risen! "He is risen indeed!" The Lord is Risen! "He is risen indeed!" The Lord is Risen! "He is risen indeed!" Today as we come to celebrate this Easter Sunday, you know at the last Mass someone went and says, "Father, look at the resurrection of Christ. You know every year the sun comes beaming in through there, through that resurrection window." And of course it does because we are one of the few churches in Erie that was built the way it was supposed to be built. You always, the churches were always, the altar had to be facing the east, why? The sun was rising. Right? Rises in the east, sets in the west. You got it. So it rises in the east and so always we are resurrection people. That's why the way the churches has always been designed from the beginning was they always face the resurrection so that we could be ready when Christ came. That we would be facing Him. That is the point. And, so He always comes in and reflects like that.

But you know, as this morning I was sitting there watching, every year, I watch the movie The Greatest Story Ever Told. And, I just put in the one part and I watched the resurrection and I love that one because right there is, it kind of schmaltzy but I can be schmaltzy a couple times a year, Christmas and Easter, and when this happens, it is all dark. They are complaining about Jesus is dead. Then all of the sudden you hear the halleluiahs chorus real quiet. And then the halleluiahs chorus builds. And then they go to the tomb and the tomb is empty and everybody starts crying and screaming and jumping up and down. It is a great movie. It is a great theme because there is the excitement that He is not dead but He is alive. But so often when we come to church on Easter Sunday, we always have packed Masses. You look out and some of the people are excited, some of the people are oh I have to go or whatever it is. But we don't experience in our own hearts the power of the resurrection. And if you really want to experience the power of the resurrection in your life so that you know that Christ is alive and you can feel that power, you are going to have to do three things. And the three things you are going to have to do the Scriptures deal with a little bit today. But the first thing you and I have to do is deal with our sin. The second thing we have to do is believe in the resurrection. And the third thing we have to do is surrender to the living Christ. So let's deal with each of them.

The first thing that you and I have to do, if you want to experience the power of the resurrection, if you want to live forever and not have to wait to start living until you die, you have to die to something else first. And that means you and I have to die to our sin. And we all know what our sin is, well no we don't. I have heard more confessions this Lent and Easter than I have at any other time for priesthood for whatever reason. Lots of confessions, a lot of people going to confession and that is a great thing. It means you are starting to get a better sense. But, you know I had a great friend who was a Lutheran pastor and this great friend who is Lutheran pastor, we went to Seminary together and different seminaries of course. But he is always sitting there saying to me or used to be until I confronted him on it. He would say, "Larry, you know the problem with you Catholics?" "What, Doug is the problem with us Catholics?" He says, "You are always confessing but never repenting." And I would say to him, "Oh

you do know Doug, don't you by the teachings of the Church, you are not forgiven for confessing. You are only forgiven for repenting." Right?

So you could confess all you want. You could've gone in line and confessed all your sins your whole life. If you did not repent of those sins, that means finally dealt with these sins and saying, "Okay, I am done with this sin by the grace of God." Now in your weakness you might fail, but if you want to deal with the power of the resurrection, the surest way you will stop experiencing God's joy and power of resurrection is when you bring sin into your life. Because when you bring sin into your life, the wages of sin is death. So automatically, if you sin or continue to sin, you won't experience the power of Christ resurrection because you keep embracing death. You are not embracing life. So this Easter, let this be a different type of Easter. Let this be the day, or it says in the Second Reading, "search the things from above. Not the things of the earth." The things of the earth are the sins that we embrace ourselves with. And we cling.

But listen, hear me. Everything you see, even this beautiful church, the people around you, it is all going to be gone. Nothing on this earth is forever. So you can keep clinging to the earth, but you cling to that which doesn't live forever. Or you can cling to Jesus. So think about your sin and let me think of mine because this is for me too, let me give you a hint. I cling to my sin a lot. And what I have to do is sit there and this Easter say, "Lord, I am sorry for these things and doing it my way. Jesus, I repent. Jesus, I am going to stop this by your grace." Because until you and I get that in our minds, that I am going to stop this, we will never experience life. So think about those things that keep you from full life. Not going to church every week. Having sex outside of marriage. Committing adultery. Getting drunk on purpose. Fill in the blank. Those things are keeping you from true life. Deal with them today.

The second thing you and I have to do to experience the power of the resurrection of Christ, is inside of us, is that we have to believe that He is alive. Do you realize that there are a lot of people, even if you sit there and talk to other Christians, who are Christians for the moral relevance? Why are they a Christian, because they like the teaching of Christ. That has nothing to do with Christianity. Well, it has something to do with Christianity. But what it is we are people who believe in the resurrection. In fact, every single Apostle, when you hear the First Reading today, they were all witnesses to what? The Bread of Life, the Resurrection, they ate and drank in His company. And, every Apostle, every single one, except for John, was killed for that belief. And they all died professing one thing. He is not dead. He is alive.

The question very simply today, is do you believe that? Do you really believe that? That Christ isn't dead, that He is alive. That when you write the date today, 2009 AD, means that He is alive today. It is in the year of our Lord. It is a resurrection of faith. It is an affirmation of faith that you believe that you can be in this relationship with this Living Lord. And that He is alive and because He is alive, you and I will be alive forever. So the second thing that you really have to do is believe. And you have to make that an active belief. That statement of belief, Lord I believe. And if you struggle, say help my unbelief. But make an act of faith.

The third thing that you and I have to do to experience the power of resurrection this Easter Sunday and all the days of our life is we have to surrender to this Living Lord. If Christ is alive and He is, and Christ is present here, and He is, He is a resurrected appearance right there before us in the Blessed Sacrament in that tabernacle, He is here. And He says to you and me this Easter Sunday, Will you completely surrender your life to me? Will you die to yourself, die to your sin, believe in me, and let me live in and through you? Because that is the key. You can repent all you want. That is not enough. Bad people repent. Good people repent. Atheist repent. They all say they are sorry and I am not going to do that anymore because it brings pain upon them. That isn't enough. You can believe Jesus Christ rose from the dead. The devil believes that and "he shutters," says Saint James. Believing that Christ is alive isn't enough. What you and I have to do beyond repenting, beyond believing, is we have to surrender. And, we have to let Jesus Christ take over full control of our live today.

Now I will let you do that and we will do that together, those who want after communion. As an aside, five people left early last week, in my church? Could you imagine? Nobody ever leaves early especially on Easter Sunday, people. Back there you see those nice ushers; the ushers have baseball bats out in the hallway. If you try to leave before the final blessing they will send you to Jesus in a gentle kind compassionate manner. You will experience Christ real fast. You don't do that on Easter Sunday or on any day of the week in my church. Don't forget it. But the reality is, you see, the people just get up and leave. They don't care. It doesn't matter. They are just going through the motions. "I went to church, Father. Be happy." No, I won't be happy. Christ wants more than you to just show up to church on Easter Sunday. He wants your life. He wants you to come completely and fully for all eternity, to fully surrender to Him. And, He wants to take you. And He wants to come inside of you and He wants to live resurrection power inside of you. But He will never force himself. He just invites. Will you let Me come in? What is your answer? May each of you know His love today and forever, amen.