

Chapter 12

HE ROSE AGAIN FROM THE DEAD

After we considered the journey from Good Friday to Saturday as the “absence” of God, we arrive at the dawn of Easter Sunday, when we celebrate the life of the Risen Christ.

The oldest narrative about this event comes to us through Saint Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians. Paul retold it word for word from what he had heard from the eyewitnesses. The narration speaks, in the first place, about the death of Our Lord for our sins, His burial, His resurrection, which happened on the third day, and “that he appeared to Kephas, then to the Twelve” (1 Cor 15:5)

This fact is theologically expressed in our profession of faith: I believe in Jesus Christ who “rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and is seated at the right hand of God”.

In reference to the symbol we’ve been studying, the one we stripped of all its luminous elements, we will clothe it again and we focus our sight in the living and beating heart of Christ, of the Risen One who shows us the wounds of His offering.

Testimonies abound in Scripture about the reality of Christ’s Resurrection: the Son of God has not remained in the tomb, because it was impossible For Him to be held by the throes of death. (Cf. Acts 2:24) and the tomb could not retain “the one who lives” (Rev 1:18), Him who is the source of life itself. Because, just as Jonah was in the belly of the whale, so Jesus crucified was in the heart of the earth (Cf. Mat 12, 40) until he fulfilled His mission on a Saturday.

Indeed, on resurrection day the Lord Jesus culminated the work of creation, so that mankind and all the cosmos would share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. (Cf. Rom 8: 21). And this is why the angels proclaim “He is not here”. He cannot be found in the tomb; he was a pilgrim on the land of men, he has ended His road at the sepulcher, like all of us, but he has defeated death and, in an absolutely new way, out of a pure act of love, has opened earth wide open toward heaven. Once this extraordinary work is fulfilled, the lifeless body has been pierced through by the life-giving breath of God and, having broken the gates of the sepulcher, He has risen gloriously.

The Gospel writers found it difficult, almost impossible, to describe the encounters with the Risen Christ, to the point that, when they do, they seem to stutter and contradict each other. Of the four versions about the apparitions it’s impossible to make one continuous narration; however, the format of each one is the same: uncertainty, disappointment and fear on the disciples’ or women’s part; Jesus takes the initiative, appearing mysteriously; the disciples react with awe and incredulity; Jesus opens their eyes so they can recognize Him, He shows them signs that He is the same one who was with them; they recognize Him, Jesus entrusts to them a mission and disappears.

This schematic way of narrating the resurrection of Jesus has a goal: to show that faith in Jesus was not born in the disciples' heart, it came to them from outside. The encounter with Jesus happens in a completely new plane. He cannot be seen like He was during His mortal life anymore, now He can only be perceived in the realm of faith. The Emmaus pilgrims recognize Him after the explanation of Scriptures and the breaking of the bread. This narration shows a clear allusion to the liturgy, because it joins the service of the word with the Eucharistic breaking of the bread. In the word and the sacrament they meet with the Risen Christ.

In our times, marked by anxiety and uncertainty, we relive the event of the resurrection, which has changed the history of mankind. Those who are still bound with the chains of suffering and death, wait, sometimes unconsciously, the hope of the resurrected Christ.

The risen Christ lives in the hearts of His faithful while they await that fulfillment; and their lives are swept up by Christ into the heart of divine life, so that they may "live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised."¹

He ascended into heaven

In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, St Luke presents the Ascension of the Lord forty days after his Resurrection. This event must be understood, not as a journey into space to the farthest stars; because, deep down, even the stars are made of physical elements like Earth.

Christ's Ascension means that He no longer belongs to the world of corruption and death which conditions our lives. It means He belongs completely to God. He, the Eternal Son, has taken humanity into the presence of God, He has taken the body and blood in a transfigured way.

"Heaven", Benedict XVI explains, "is not a place that, before Christ's Ascension was barred off by a positive, punitive decree of God's, to be opened up one day in just as positive a way. The reality of heaven only comes into existence through the confluence of God and man, Heaven is to be defined as the contact of the being "man" with the being "God"; this confluence of God and man took place once and for all in Christ when He went beyond *bios* through death to new life. Heaven is accordingly that future of man and of mankind which the latter cannot give to itself, which is therefore closed to it so long as it waits for itself, and which was first and fundamentally opened up in the man whose field of existence was God and through whom God entered into the creature "man".²

Man finds room in God through Christ; the human being has been taken inside God's very life. And, since God embraces and holds up all of the cosmos, the ascension of the Lord means that Christ has not gone far away from us, but that now, due to the fact that He is with the Father, He is close to every person, forever. The Lord is always within talking distance. Each one of us can

¹ Cf *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 655

² J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 315

familiarly call to Him, each one of us can talk to Him. We may part ourselves from Him internally. We may live our lives with our backs turned to Him. But he waits for us always and is always close to us.

Our resurrection

There is another aspect to be considered about this topic. The resurrection of Christ is an event that refers not only to His person, but that includes all of us. Due to Baptism which incorporates us to Christ, He is our resurrection. “Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep ... For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life” (1Cor 15:20-22).

The prophet Ezekiel had announced it: “I am now going to open your graves; I shall raise you from your graves, my people, and lead you back to the soil of Israel.” (Ez 37:12). These prophetic words acquire a particular value on Easter Day, when the promise of the Creator is kept.

To the Christian, says Benedict XVI, faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is an expression of certainty that the saying that seems to be only a beautiful dream is in fact true: “Love is strong as death” (Song 8:6).³

Today we are under the domain of biological life (*bios*), which is also the domain of death, but we hope that one day eternal life that will leave behind the power of death will begin.

This is our hope, for there exists in our heart the desire for eternal life; however, our fate is to die, and we can only somehow survive if we stay in other people’s memories, through our children, or through the works we performed. But in them we will only be like a shadow, and not definitely, because they too will disappear. And if this is the case, there can only be one solution: abide in God, in ‘He who is’, in the one who lives forever. In God man can abide not as a shadow, because in Him, we are closer to ourselves.

Love requires perpetuity, the impossibility of being destroyed; it’s a cry that demands eternity, but which is enclosed in the realm of death. Love manifests what only immortality can give: to be in the other one, in the one who remains even after I have disappeared. Love always creates some kind of immortality.

When somebody values love more than life, that is to say, when someone is willing to subordinate life to love, love is mightier than death and it is stronger than death. But, to make love stronger than death, it must also be more than simple life. Love must overcome the power of *bios* and bring it into its service; then natural life will be surrounded and incorporated to the strength of love.

³ J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 302

Love is the foundation of immortality, and immortality proceeds from love. This means that God, who is Love, who has loved everyone, has made them immortal. This is what the Bible means when it says that His resurrection is our life. If Christ was raised from the dead, so we will be raised from the dead, because love is stronger than death. And if He wasn't raised from the dead, then neither we will be raised from the dead, because then death has the last word (cf. 1Cor 15:16ff).

If in Christ love has conquered death, because He was raised, it's out of love for us. He has wanted to stay with us. This means that our own and individual love cannot conquer death, that left to itself our love is just a scream without answer. Thus, only love united to the divine power of life and God's love, who raised Jesus, can found our immortality. But, in spite of everything, our way of immortality is dependent on our way of loving.⁴

The Cross of the Apostolate, symbol of the resurrection

It is not difficult to discover in the image of the Cross of the Apostolate the glory of the Risen Christ, because it is a glorious cross, haloed in light, floating in space, enveloped by radiant clouds, bathed in the light of the Holy Spirit, Who hovers over it. And in the center of it is the heart of the Risen Christ alive and beating.

If we substitute the wooden cross with an image of Christ, we would see the icon that usually represents the Ascension of Christ to heaven, with open arms, surrounded by light piercing through the clouds. In other places we have mentioned that it is not a stagnant cross, but is in constant movement and can represent Christ's humanity transfigured, as He moves from the darkness of the wood to the brilliance of crystal.

In showing the living and beating heart of the Risen Christ with the wounds of His passion and death, the Cross of the Apostolate transports us to the Gospel scene where the Risen Jesus shows His open side to doubting Thomas. Thomas needed to see the wounds of the Crucified and touch them with his hands to believe. Such incredulity is paradoxically useful and precious, because it helps us to purify all false concepts of God and leads us to discover his true face; the face of a God who, in Christ, has taken upon himself the wounds of injured humankind.

In the same way the Trinitarian character reflected in the Cross of the Apostolate shows in turn what Scripture tells us about the resurrection of Christ. The Three Divine Persons act together at once and They also manifest Their own originality. The resurrection happens by the power of the Father. He raised Christ, His Son, from the dead. (Cf Acts 2:24) and in this way the Son has brought in His humanity in a perfect way "with His body" to the Trinity. Saint Paul insists in the manifestation of the power of God through the action of the Holy Spirit, who has vivified Jesus' dead humanity and has called Him to the glorious sate of the Lord. (Cf. Rom 6:4; 2Cor 13:4; Phil 3:10; Eph 1:19-22).

The vision of the Cross of the Apostolate gives to us the spiritual testimony of Concepcion Cabrera, a testimony of encounter with the Risen Christ. Faith grows when there is visual contact

⁴ Cf. J. Ratzinger, *Introduction*, 305/306

with the heart of Christ, with the glorious heart that does not hide its wounds, but showed itself and continues to point out to us the trials and suffering of every human being.

“By His wounds you have been healed” (1Pe 2:24), this is the message Peter addressed to the early converts. Those wounds that, in the beginning were an obstacle for Thomas’ faith being a sign of Jesus apparent failure, those same wounds have become, in the encounter with the Risen Christ, sign of a victorious love. These wounds Jesus acquired for our love help us to understand who is God and to repeat also “My Lord and my God”. Only a God who loves us to the point of carrying our wounds and our pain, above all the innocent pain, is worthy of faith.

How many wounds, how much suffering there is in the world! We are never lacking in natural disasters and human tragedy that cause countless victims and massive material damage. We have not rid ourselves of the plague of hunger, or incurable diseases, terrorism and kidnappings, the thousand faces of violence – sometimes justified in name of religion – the contempt for life and violation of human rights, the exploitation of the human person.

Through the wounded heart of the Risen Christ we can see with the eyes of hope the evil that afflicts humankind. The Lord has not rid the world of suffering and evil, but he has defeated them at the root with the superabundance of his grace. To the arrogance of Evil he has pitted the omnipotence of his Love, expressed symbolically in His Heart. As a vessel for peace and joy He has left us Love, who does not fear Death.⁵

With this topic of the resurrection we have finished the part that pertains to our profession of faith in Christ, which is the central core of our Creed. The following articles find their timing after the resurrection, the time when the Church is enlivened by the force of the Holy Spirit. The communion of saints and the forgiveness of sins are an expansion of the fundamental profession “I believe in the Holy Spirit”. These topics detail the specific ways in which the Holy Spirit acts in history through the sacraments. Let’s move on to consider the third part of the Creed.

⁵ Ideas inspired by the Message Urbe et Orbi, Benedict XVI, Easter 2007 (4/8/07)