

The Resurrection of Our Lord

Monday I Corinthians 15: 53-57

Overcoming Death

In the prayer we are saying this week, we praise God for overcoming death through Jesus. If death was overcome by Jesus over nineteen hundred years ago, why do we see, or at least hear, of people dying all of the time? And it is not just mean, rotten, criminals that are dying, is it? People we know and love in Christ, people we call Brothers or Sisters in Christ have died just like all the rest.

When St. Paul taunts death in our text, he does not deny it happens. He speaks to death as if it were a person saying, "Where O death is your victory? Where O death is your sting?" He speaks to death as still being here, but he all but bursts out laughing over the fact that Mr. Death is missing something. "O D-e-a-th, you are missing something," says Paul. "You think you have the victory but you do not any longer. You think you have a sting, but not to those in Jesus. He took death's stinger for us.

Luther described it this way. Now that Christ Jesus has carried our sins to the cross and paid for them completely, death has no more stinger. Now death comes to us, said Luther, like a bee without its stinger having only honey in its mouth. Although death is always frightful, even as a bee without its stinger will still make us jump, when it finally does come to us, there will be nothing but honey there.

Paul explains why this is in the rest of our text. He says that the sting of death is sin and the strength of sin is the law. Where there is no more sin, where there is nothing to feel guilty over, bad about, or ashamed of, death loses its sting. But sin can only be taken out of the way by answering the law. As long as the law can accuse us, our sin will be before us and death will sting.

But Jesus overcame death, removed its stinger by fulfilling the Law, both its requirements and its punishments. There is nothing left for you to do to fulfill the Law and make God happy with you. Jesus did it all. There is nothing left for you to pay in order to pay off the Law. Jesus did it all. If there is no Law, there is no sin. If there is no sin, there is no stinger that comes with death.

Ah but we still have this fear of death, do not we? Even with Easter joy ringing in our ears, we still have this nagging fear of death. So what? Fear may chase us this way and that sometimes, much as a mad, stinger-less honeybee will. So what? A bee without a stinger can do nothing once it catches up to us. Neither can death.

Prayer: Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Gates of Heaven Jokes

Our Collect this week refers to the Gate of everlasting life.≡ Heaven does have gates. The Book of Revelation speaks of 12 of them. Our hymns refer to them. So do many jokes about heaven. In the jokes almost always St. Peter is manning those gates, and there is almost always a problem for the person who is seeking to enter. Thankfully, humor does not have to be true to be funny.

But the gates of heaven are no joking matter. They are real, and they had to be opened for us. This is what Jesus did. The gates of heaven are closed to sinners. There is only perfection in heaven. The four living beings full of eyes around the throne of God sing, AHoly, Holy, Holy≡ day and night because that is all they see. There is a ANo Sinners Allowed≡ sign on the gates of heaven. They will never open for a sinner.

That is what the Law says, and no amount of good works, no amount of being really sorry, no amount of really trying, or even really believing can make these gates swing open. But these gates open for Jesus. He is true God, but more important for us, He is true Man. He put Himself in the womb of the Virgin Mary taking our sins upon Himself.

The Bible says, AGod made Him to be sin.≡ So completely covered with our sins was Jesus that God the Father could not even see His Son, and so He turned away from Him in disgust.

That was Good Friday; it was not the end of the story. Death could not hold Jesus because He had successfully paid for all our sins. Once you pay a penalty the jailer has to let you out. Well Jesus paid the penalty our sins deserve, so death, hell, and Satan had to let Him go. More than that, heaven had to receive Him too. This Man who is God rose from the dead free of our sins, victorious over death and the devil. The gates of heaven must swing open for the God-Man. He is the rightful Ruler of all heaven and earth.

In Jesus, as you are by Baptism, in Jesus the pastor puts you when he forgives your sins, in Jesus and Jesus in you is what you are when you eat His Body and drink His Blood in the Holy Communion. Therefore, if heaven=s gates must swing wide for Jesus they must swing wide for those in Him. If heaven=s gates cannot be closed on Jesus, then they cannot now, nor ever be closed on you. People may joke about heaven=s gates being locked or closed, but the real joke is on sin, death, and devil who thought they had heaven locked up so tight no sinner could ever enter.

Prayer: Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord=s resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Wednesday Romans 1:4

Christ is God the Son

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead definitely proves He is God the Son. Our Bible reading for tonight says Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead.≡ How does His resurrection show this? Other people were raised from the dead in the Bible, but they were not shown to be God the Son by virtue of that fact. What is different about the case of Jesus?

An illustration first used in the 5th century can help us understand. When a fisherman goes fishing, he baits a hook with worm. He is careful to conceal the sharp metal hook in the worm because when the fish reaches the hook it immediately tries to spit it out because it cannot swallow metal.

Hanging on the cross Psalm 22 reveals to us that Jesus was≡a worm and no man.≡ St. Paul in 2 Corinthians says God the Father made Jesus to be sin. The sins of the world were so thickly piled on Jesus that not only did He not look like God, He did not even look human. Now remember the devil had known ever since the Garden of Eden that the Seed of the woman would come and crush his head. The devil had tried to kill that Seed in Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, David, and more. As soon as the whereabouts of the Seed was identified by the wise men, Satan tried to kill Him. As soon as the Seed was identified as an adult by His Baptism, Satan came out into the desert to get Him. Luke tells you when that failed, Satan left for a more opportune time.

At the cross the devil saw his opportune time. There Jesus hung helpless, sin covered, forsaken by God. Satan thinks, Now, I have got Him,≡ and like a hungry fish he swallowed Jesus in one bite. Jesus the worm≡ went down easy. But once Jesus was dead He was done paying for the sins of the world. He had completed His mission of saving the world. He no longer voluntarily veiled His divine power and might, and that is when Satan felt the hook and had to spit Him back out. Had Jesus not been truly God death could have swallowed Him for good. But because He is 100% God, Satan and death had to spit Him out. His being spit≡ out or raised proves that He is God since only God cannot die. His resurrection proves that all along He was a very God of very God.≡ His weakness, His suffering, His sighing, crying, bleeding and dying were done voluntarily in order to redeem us.

Prayer: Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Thursday John 8:28

Christ=s Teaching is True

All this week we are basking in the glow of Christ=s Easter victory over all the woes of this life. In our catechism we teach that the Resurrection of Christ proves that His teaching is true. How is that?

When Jesus cleansed the Temple for the first time the Jews demanded He show a miraculous sign to prove He had authority to do this. Jesus pointed them to His rising after being dead three days. How does that show Jesus= authority? How does that show all the rest of His teaching is true?

Jesus walked this earth looking to all the world like an ordinary man. When other men got tired, Jesus got tired. When they got hungry, He got hungry. When they ate and slept, He ate and slept. But Jesus taught some mighty incredible things. He told people that the Law they so much valued was not given by God to save them. He told them that He was the only begotten Son of who given by the Father that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. He told them His flesh was life-giving so that whoever ate His flesh and drank His blood would live forever. Pretty incredible stuff.

Would you believe me if I told you the moon really was made of green cheese? Would you believe me if I told you that there really was a Wizard of Oz, a group of Power Rangers in California, and a beanstalk reaching to a land of giants? Probably not. But if I told you that I would die and rise again three days later and then did that very thing, my miraculous resurrection would be proof positive of every other thing I had said.

Sure other people had been raised before Jesus. But Jesus was raised never, ever to die again. Jesus had gone through the change that happens in the wink of an eye to those living when Christ returns. Jesus had the body that is as much different as a plant is from the seed that was planted. In other words, Jesus had a glorified body.

In our world people who make movies or do incredible things in sports are often listened to very closely. Movie stars go to Washington, D.C. to testify on things just because they happened to make a movie on it. Sports figures are listened to when they teach about certain diseases or helping unfortunate people just because they are real good at their sports. How much more can we listen to our Jesus, hang on every Word of His that tells us we are forgiven, going to heaven, and saved from all eternity! He has shown that He has authority over our sins, the devil, and even over death. He certainly knows what He is talking about.

Prayer: Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord=s resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Receipt

What happens when you are leaving a store with an item that is too big to fit in one of the store's bags? As you go out the door, usually someone will stop you. What do they ask you to see? Proof that you actually paid for the item. You cannot just assure them that you paid. You must show them a receipt, a statement that says you paid the correct amount for the merchandise you are attempting to leave the store with. The receipt is not the payment; it is the proof that you did pay.

Easter is God the Father's receipt that our sins were actually paid for in full. Easter, the resurrection of Jesus from the grave, is not the payment. The payment was the holy precious blood Jesus poured out on the cross and His innocent suffering and death there. Good Friday was the last great payment for our sins. If Jesus had not actually finished paying for our sins, He would have remained dead. He would have had to go to hell forever. That is why people outside of Christ must go to hell forever because they can never ever pay off their debt of sin.

But Jesus did not stay dead. That is because He finished paying for our sins. He was all done on Good Friday. The Father raised Him from the dead proving that Jesus had sufficiently paid for all sins. There was no more payment needed. No more suffering, bleeding or dying was needed.

This is a very important teaching because we Christians do suffer, bleed and die still. However, we never do so in payment for our sins. How could that be? When you leave a store with an item you can prove you paid for, they do not make you go back and pay again, do they? That would not be honest, would it? Even stores owned and operated by sinners do not make people go back and pay twice. Our Holy God certainly does no such thing either. So when the thought comes into our heads, and it will, that we are suffering or dying to pay for our sins, we need to recall our receipt, Easter. Since the Father raised Jesus from the dead He must be satisfied with His payment. He could not be bill collecting now in hospital rooms, sick rooms, or funeral homes.

But be real clear on this. Your receipt is not your feelings or even your conscience. Many times we will feel like we are suffering for our sins. Many times our conscience will assure us that our sins are indeed the reason we are suffering. But thankfully God does not go by our feelings or our consciences. He goes by what Jesus did and what He declared by raising Him from the dead. The Father does not look into your heart or conscience but into His. There He can find nothing but a $\text{APaid In Full} \cong$ receipt.

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Saturday I Corinthians 15:20

The First Ripe Tomato

Ordinary illustrations are the best. Jesus spoke of the things of the Kingdom of God using everyday things in life. Tomatoes provide a great illustration of what the Scriptures mean when they say Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.≡

When you plant tomatoes, you put the plant in the ground and wait. Soon little green tomatoes appear. They get bigger. Some start to turn yellowish orange. Then one day, all of a sudden, so it seems, one is ripe. Now although that one is ripe there is still a whole bunch of tomatoes that are yellow, orange, or even still green. But as soon as the first one is ripe, you know that it is only a matter of time before all the other ones will be. The first one ripening is a guarantee that all those other tomatoes will ripen.

Jesus is the first to ever rise from the dead never to die again. He is the first-fruits of all those who have died in Him. Christ is the firstfruits of all Christians. As Christ rose from the dead, surely all Christians will rise. Just as no one doubts that all the tomatoes will soon be ripe once the first one is, so now that Christ is risen from the dead we do not need to doubt that all Christians will rise too.

Easter is only the beginning. Just like with tomatoes it is only a matter of time before all rise. Why? Well, think of those tomatoes. You know they will all ripen because everything has been done that is necessary for them to mature. Likewise, we know all Christians will rise no matter how long they have been dead because Jesus did everything for them to rise. He died their death. He paid for their sins. He kept the Law that said sinners must keep it or stay dead. But that is not all. Jesus also applied His saving work to Christians. He baptized them. He absolved them of their sins. He fed them with His life-giving body and blood.

Another way to look at this is from the standpoint of other vegetables. One ripened tomato does not say anything about the carrots, radishes, or corn, does it? But it does say a bunch about all the other tomatoes. They cannot help but follow the first. That is how certain your resurrection from the dead is and all the others in Christ. It cannot be any other way than that we will all rise as our Jesus did. As an Easter hymn says, *Made like Him/ Like Him we rise/ Ours the cross,/ the grave, the skies.*≡ Now if we were not joined to Him in Baptism, perfect like Him by Absolution, and Abodied and blooded≡ to Him by Holy Communion, that would be another story. But we are. Our story is resurrection, ripening≡ like Jesus the Firstfruits did.

Prayer: Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.