



WHY IS EASTER THE CENTER OF OUR FAITH ?

Saint
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PASCHAL MYSTERY, THE CENTER OF OUR FAITH

- The summit of the Liturgical Year is the Easter Triduum—from the evening of Holy Thursday to the evening of Easter Sunday. Though chronologically three days, they are liturgically one day unfolding for us the unity of Christ's Paschal Mystery (USCCB).
- The wonderful works of God among the people of the Old Testament were but a prelude to the work of Christ the Lord in redeeming mankind and giving perfect glory to God. He accomplished this work principally by the Paschal mystery of his blessed Passion, Resurrection from the dead, and glorious Ascension, whereby 'dying he destroyed our death, rising he restored our life (*St. Augustine - CCC 1067*)
- The Church celebrates in the liturgy above all the Paschal mystery by which Christ accomplished the work of our salvation (CCC 1067)
- In the weekly reckoning of time Sunday recalls the day of Christ's Resurrection. It is *Easter* which returns week by week, celebrating Christ's victory over sin and death, the fulfilment in him of the first creation and the dawn of "the new creation" (St. John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 1998)

THE RESURRECTION, CENTRAL EVENT IN HISTORY OF SALVATION

- The Resurrection of Jesus is the fundamental event upon which Christian faith rests (St. John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, 1998)
- For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is without any foundation, and you are still in your sins (1 Cor 15:16-17)
- The mystery of Christ's resurrection is a real event, with manifestations that were historically verified, as the New Testament bears witness. (CCC, 639)
- Although the Resurrection was an historical event that could be verified by the sign of the empty tomb and by the reality of the apostles' encounters with the risen Christ, still it remains at the very heart of the mystery of faith as something that transcends and surpasses history. This is why the risen Christ does not reveal himself to the world, but to his disciples, "to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are now his witnesses to the people" (CCC 647).

THE CROSS AND THE THEORY OF REDEMPTION

St. Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo?* (1095 ca.)

- Concept of satisfaction
- Original sin (offence to God) causes infinite guilt of man, which requires infinite satisfaction
- Man cannot perform restorative actions with infinite value; only God can, but God is not the debtor
- Therefore, God becomes man (Jesus), and through his Incarnation and Cross pays off our debt
- The Redemption is applied to us through incorporation in the sacrifice of Christ by means of the Sacraments (especially Baptism and Eucharist)

PROBLEMS WITH THE THEORY OF REDEMPTION

- Why is the Cross necessary (any action of God would have infinite value)?
- What is the Resurrection for?
 - Christ is God
 - There is life after death
 - Is that enough? Is this the Good News of Christianity (juridical)?
- The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by his death, Christ liberates us from sin; by his Resurrection, he opens for us the way to a new life. This new life is above all justification that reinstates us in God's grace, "so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Justification consists in both victory over the death caused by sin and a new participation in grace. It brings about filial adoption so that men become Christ's brethren, as Jesus himself called his disciples after his Resurrection: "Go and tell my brethren." We are brethren not by nature, but by the gift of grace, because that adoptive filiation gains us a real share in the life of the only Son, which was fully revealed in his Resurrection.(CCC 654)

THE EXISTENTIAL EFFECTS OF THE PASCHAL MYSTERY - I

- The Apostles after the Resurrection until Pentecost.
 - Fear of the Jews, closed doors (Jn 20:19.26)
 - Thomas: My Lord and my God (Jn 20:28)
 - "I go fishing" (Jn 21:3)
 - Emmaus (Lk 24:26.37-38 – explanation of the Cross, fear of ghost)
 - Hardness of heart (Mk 14:11)
 - Doubts at Ascension (Mt 28:17)
 - Closed doors at Pentecost (Ac 2)
- Pentecost makes the Resurrection (the whole Paschal Mystery) a transcendent event
- From external to internal, shared, existential (surpassing time)
- The life of the Apostles changes completely and they become witnesses of the Resurrection throughout the world, until martyrdom (fear of death is gone)
- "Since the children are all made of flesh and blood, Jesus likewise shared in the same flesh and blood, so that by his death he might destroy the one who has the power of death—that is, the devil— and set free those who throughout their lives had been held in slavery by the fear of death." (Heb 2:14-15)

THE EXISTENTIAL EFFECTS OF THE PASCHAL MYSTERY - II

- What is sin?
 - Sin is an offense against reason, truth, and right conscience.... It wounds the nature of man and injures human solidarity (CCC 1849), and- "an offence against God" (CCC 1850)
 - Chet אָחַזַּת Chatta'ah:תְּאַחַזַּת - "missing the mark"
 - You must never eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you were to eat from it, you would surely die (Gen 2:17)
- What is death?
 - Death is separation from the Love of God (cf. CCC 1035 on Hell), destruction of image of God (Gen 1:27). It takes away freedom and brings about slavery (fear of death)
- Consequences of sin/death in our heart/being:
 - Shame of nakedness (Gen 3:7) – weakness, limitation
 - Fear of God (Gen 3:8-10) – Sense of abandonment – Twisted image of God (cf. CCC 399)
 - Division – the other is an adversary, a potential enemy (Gen 3:12, CCC 400): difficulty of relationship
- Reaction of Adam and Eve (and all of us):
 - To shame: cover it up (non-acceptance of weakness)
 - To fear: hiding, alienation, search for life without God
 - To division: separation from other (selfishness, mutual accusation, *mors tua vita mea*, revenge against injustice)
- Ultimate consequence – division within ourselves (Rom 7:14-25), constant dissatisfaction

LIBERATION FROM SIN AND NEWNESS OF LIFE - I

- How does Christ liberate us from sin (existentially, not just by paying the debt)?
 - “He made him who did not know sin to be sin for our sake, so that through him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21).
 - In His Passion and Cross, He voluntarily experiences fully all the consequences of sin (cf. Mt 27:42-43), but he does what we cannot do: he conquers the fear of death.
 - Shame: He fully accepts to be made weak
 - He was crucified in weakness (2 Cor 13:4)
 - “For the sake of the joy that lay before him, he endured the cross, ignoring its shame, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2)
 - He died naked on the Cross (see Mt 27:35)
 - Fear: He experiences the fear of being abandoned by the Father, yet He trusts Him till the end
 - Sweating blood: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me—nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done” (Lk 22:42)
 - “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46)
 - “Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit.” (Lk 23:46)
 - Division: He is rejected and abandoned by everyone (enemies and friends), tremendous injustice, and yet He forgives them all:
 - “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” (Lk 23:34)

LIBERATION FROM SIN AND NEWNESS OF LIFE - II

- In this way the Cross convinces us all of being sinners:
 - It is precisely in the Passion, when the mercy of Christ is about to vanquish it, that sin most clearly manifests its violence and its many forms: unbelief, murderous hatred, shunning and mockery by the leaders and the people, Pilate's cowardice and the cruelty of the soldiers, Judas' betrayal — so bitter to Jesus, Peter's denial and the disciples' flight. (CCC 1851)
 - Since our sins made the Lord Christ suffer the torment of the cross, those who plunge themselves into disorders and crimes crucify the Son of God anew in their hearts (CCC 598)
 - For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. (Rom 11:32)
- Yet, in the Resurrection, He conquers death and its fear, giving us the possibility of a new life (His risen life, He dies no more):
 - Accepting our weaknesses and limitations without shame (loving ourselves)
 - Trusting God fully even when He makes us pass through what we do not want (loving God with all our hearts, minds, and souls)
 - Loving and forgiving everyone, including our enemies (loving our neighbors as ourselves) – see Mt 22:36-40
- This new life is received with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit following the Ascension, and dwells within us:
 - “It is for your benefit that I go away, because if I don’t go away the Counselor will not come to you. If I go, I will send him to you.” (Jn 16:7)
 - “And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.” (Rom 8:11)
- This experience of the Paschal Mystery becomes ours through the Sacraments:
 - “By baptism men are plunged into the paschal mystery of Christ: they die with Him, are buried with Him, and rise with Him; they receive the spirit of adoption as sons “in which we cry: Abba, Father”, and thus become true adorers whom the Father seeks. In like manner, as often as they eat the supper of the Lord they proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes” (*Sacrosanctum Concilium, 6*)

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN THE EUCHARIST

- The Second Vatican Council emphasizes strongly active participation in the liturgy:
 - Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium, 14*)
- What does active participation mean? Activism?
- Every Eucharist is the celebration of the Paschal Mystery, applying its effect to us over and over again till the end of time (transcendent event)
- In saying "Amen" we express our faith in what Christ accomplished through the Cross and the Resurrection, not only "juridically" (atonement, revelation of His Divinity, life after death), but also ontologically (existentially): we recognize our sins, our repeated crucifixion of Christ through the fear of death and ask confidently for the new life of the Resurrection, which is Love of God and of our neighbor as ourselves (constant and precarious journey of faith)
- The more we experience the power of the Paschal Mystery, the more we become witnesses of the truth of His Resurrection, not only historically, but also within us, in our lives