

EASTER – RESURRECTION OF THE LORD

Excerpt from Pope Benedict XV's homily - *11 April 2009*

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31 March 2024

Brothers and sisters, what is resurrection? It does not form part of our experience, and so the message often remains to some degree beyond our understanding, a thing of the past. The Church tries to help us understand it, by the language of symbols. During the Easter Vigil, the Church points out the significance of this day principally through three symbols: light, water, and the song – Alleluia.

First, there is light. God's creation begins with the command: "Let there be light!" (*Gen 1:3*). Where there is light, life is born. In the Biblical message, light is the most immediate image of God: He is total Radiance, Life, Truth, Light. In the resurrection, God says once again: "Let there be light!". The resurrection of Jesus is an eruption of light. Death is conquered, the tomb is wide open. The Risen One himself is Light, the Light of the world. With the resurrection, the Lord's Day enters the nights of history.

Why is Christ Light? He points out our path. Now, living with him and for him, we can live in the light. The Church represents the mystery of the light of Christ in the sign of the Paschal candle, whose flame is both light and heat. The Paschal candle burns and is thereby consumed: Cross and resurrection are inseparable. From the Paschal candle we all light our own candles, for whom the light of Christ enters deeply into our hearts. Linked inseparably with the resurrection of Christ, in Baptism, we are brought into the light of Christ. The baptismal candle is the symbol of light. Let us pray to the Lord that the fragile flame of the candle he has lit in us, the delicate light of his **word** and his love amid the confusions of this age, will not be extinguished in us, but will become ever stronger and brighter. It so that we, with him, can be people of the day, lighting up our time.

The second symbol of the Easter Vigil is water. It appears in Sacred Scripture two opposed meanings. On the one hand there is the sea, which appears as a force opposed to life on earth, continually threatening it. It is the element of death. And so it becomes the symbolic representation of Jesus' death on the Cross: Christ descended into the sea, into the waters of death, as Israel did into the Red Sea. Having risen from death, he gives us life. This means that Baptism is not only a cleansing, but a new birth: with Christ we, as it were, descend into the sea of death, so as to rise up again as new creatures. The other way in which we encounter water is in the form of the fresh spring that gives life, or the great river from which life comes forth. Without water there is no life. In his death, Jesus himself became the spring. Christ is the true spring of living water. In Baptism, the Lord makes us not only persons of light, but also sources from which living water bursts forth. Unfortunately, we also know the opposite: people who are like a stagnant pool of stale, or even poisoned water.

Let us ask the Lord, who has given us the grace of Baptism, for the gift always to be sources of pure, fresh water, bubbling up from the fountain of his truth and his love!

The third great symbol of the Easter Vigil is something rather different. It is the singing of the new song – the alleluia. When a person experiences great joy, he cannot keep it to himself. He has to express it, to pass it on. When a person is touched by the light of the resurrection, and encounters Life itself, with Truth and Love, he cannot merely speak about it. He has to sing. All through Scripture, we see stories of where people feel like they are sinking. But while she is still walking amid this Red Sea, she sings – she intones the song of praise. While, strictly speaking, she ought to be sinking, the Church sings the song of thanksgiving. She is standing on waters of death and yet she has already risen. Singing, she grasps at the Lord's hand, which holds her above the waters. And she knows that she is thereby raised outside the force of death and evil – a force from which otherwise there would be no way of escape – raised and drawn into the new gravitational force of God, of truth and of love.

At present, the Church and all of us are still between the two gravitational fields. But once Christ is risen, the gravitational pull of love is stronger than that of hatred. The force of gravity of life is stronger than that of death. Perhaps this is the situation of the Church in every age, perhaps it is our situation? It always seems as if she ought to be sinking, and yet she is always already saved.

Saint Paul illustrated this situation with the words: “We are as dying, and behold we live” (2 *Cor* 6:9). The Lord's saving hand holds us up, and therefore we can already sing the new song of the risen ones: alleluia!