

Easter Sunday Sermon - April 4th. 2010

Fr. Paul Check

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad. (Ps 118:24)

These words come from Psalm 118 and serve as the responsorial for this Mass. We know that today is a great day, the Resurrection of the Lord...and that the joy proper to this day—Easter joy—is something we wish to share in and feel keenly. We believe that *Christ is risen* from the dead, and yet we may still lack the sentiment the psalm expresses: “let us *rejoice* and be glad.”

We can attribute this lack to human weakness and personal sin. We know the pull the here and now have upon us...and this is not to demonize the world in any way. “God so loved the *world* that gave His only Son...” (Jn 3:16) But with humility and sincerity, we admit that the world can seem made simply for our enjoyment, and after all, we have the capacity to enjoy what it offers...and so *enjoyment* becomes an end itself, perhaps even at times, *the end*. What seems most compelling is what is most immediate...we are so chained to our senses...what we see, and hear, and touch. The sensible, pleasurable world must be “the real world.”

And all of this, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, blunts our perception of the world we cannot see, and so the spirit of our *rejoicing* at Christ’s Resurrection may be weakened. We want to lift our hearts to the Lord, but the weight of fallen human nature and its vulnerabilities weigh us down.

In nature, children grow in virtue by learning how to use their freedom well. You who are parents form your sons and daughters to grow in maturity and responsibility, by teaching them to choose rightly and so to live in an ordered way. In *super* nature—in grace—the children of God must do likewise. We must use our freedom well, and choose and act in a manner befitting disciples of Christ, who have been invited to glory—to heavenly joy—and who have received all of the instruction and means necessary to achieve that glory. *Freedom* is the condition for friendship and love...the Lord only invites and will never coerce. *His* joy is that we freely *choose Him*, and prove it by our trust and perseverance in practical action.

Much earlier in the Gospel of John (from today’s Gospel), we find these words: “He who does what is true comes to the light.” (Jn 3:21) This means that by doing what Our Blessed Lord taught us, by faithfully observing the teachings of His Holy Church—to include especially those mocked by so many—by properly forming our consciences and following them, by living the *truth*, by observing the entire liturgical calendar each year...by *doing* these things, two effects will follow: we will wean ourselves from the false promises of the here and now by restraining the sinful tendencies to which we are all prone, *and* we will come to see and grasp what is not visible to the eye, but can only be known by faith...and our *joy* will increase. Jesus Himself promised as much: “These things I have spoken to you (He has just been speaking about the necessity to keep the Commandments if we are to abide in His love), that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (Jn 15:11)

Christ’s joy. Easter joy. The joy that the world cannot give or take. Other things may give us satisfaction or pleasure—and please, God—may we receive them in the measure God intends and be grateful for them. But they cannot give us lasting joy, the joy of Jesus Christ. God put the desire *for Him* within us, and no created good can satisfy that longing, as St. Augustine once told us: “O God, you have created for yourself and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

“He who does what is true comes to the light.” Dear people, God rewards us for *doing* what is good, what is true. (cf. Mt 7:21) Our responsibilities in love to Him and to each other (the two great Commandments) are not only Christian duties, but also a means to sharpening what we might call “supernatural vision” and so to deepening supernatural joy. When we strive to live Gospel, to keep the Commandments, to receive the Sacraments, we will grow in faith, and our conviction about the hidden, though no less real, world of grace will grow...and with that conviction, our joy will be complete.

Our Mother the Church, like all good parents, marks out the path of virtue for her children. On *her* authority do we believe that the Gospel presents the historically and theologically accurate truth of the God-Man, Jesus Christ. On *her* authority, do we believe that the tomb was empty, that the disciples *rejoiced* in the presence of the Risen Lord. She shows us how to take this world in the proper measure, and how obedience and sacrifice are united to love and joy...in concrete, practical actions each day...acts of reverence, of piety, of chastity, of justice, of veracity, of detachment, of generosity.

The way to Christ, the way to Easter joy is simple, though not easy...clear, but demanding our all. Sacrifice makes us more self-forgetful; self-denial prepares the heart for self-giving; fidelity to the truth leads to clarity of vision. To embrace and to live the teachings of the Church is to embrace the *way* and the *truth* given by Christ Himself, and this is the only path to *real life* (cf. Jn 14:6)...that we might be happy with Him now, amidst the trials and disappointments of a fallen world, and perfectly so in eternity. Of course, the reverse also holds: to set aside the means is to set aside the joy.

“He saw and believed.” (Jn 20:8) We heard these words a moment ago in the Gospel. St John wrote them about himself...yet they contain a promise for us. We are not at a disadvantage because we cannot physically enter the tomb as John did. We enter it by faith, hope and charity...by prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. The truth of the Resurrection becomes more real and more personal by our cooperation with grace, by using our freedom wisely. “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God,” Jesus promised us in the Beatitudes. (Mt 5:9) Deliberate and repeated sin of any kind will always obscure our view of God...and lead to a sense of loss, and ultimately, misery. The saints—and those striving to live a holy life—are the happiest of all people, and they give the most joy to the Lord, because they are the children of God who have learned their lessons well, and used their freedom nobly.

A week from now, Jesus will say to the “doubting” Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” (Jn 20:29) He is speaking about you and me. If we have kept a good Lent, then we may be further along the road to Easter joy than we think or feel. If we have not, or if we do not have the joy proper to this greatest of days—a day greater than we know—then we are not discouraged. There is hope in the empty tomb. Christ has won salvation for us. We are weary of the world and distrustful of its promises. Now is the day to put on Christ and renew our commitment to Him. His voice calls to us in stillness and silence, if we will but listen. He is invisible to the eye, but He is real... and only in Him will we find the joy for which He has made us.