

## Feast of Christ the King 2017 – Resurrection, Ansonia

+May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength, and our Redeemer. Amen.

The celebration of the Feast of Christ the King brings us to the very heart of our faith. St. Paul in the Epistle to the Colossians wrote, *“We give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”*

What does it mean when St. Paul says we are qualified to share in the inheritance of the saints in light? It means we are changed. We are no longer just biological creatures here for a finite time and nothing more. Something profound has happened. These bodies that were once mortal must put off the rags of mortality and put on the incorruptible clothing of immortality. In 2 Esdras we read, *“He answered and said unto me, These be they that have put off the mortal clothing, and put on the immortal, and have confessed the name of God: now are they crowned, and receive palms.”* (2 Esdras 2:45)

Immortality. I have thought about immortality quite often during this past week. Last Sunday when I left church, I went to Masonicare in Wallingford to give Last Rites to a friend of our family. Ruth had fought the good fight and now after nine years of battling cancer the battle was over. It was time to go home.

I went to the Hospice Ward in the Sturges wing of the Hospital and a woman about my age came out into the hall and hailed me saying thank God, you're here. In tears, she led me to the room where he father was struggling to breathe and on the threshold of death's door. He was waiting for me. He wanted to confess. He

wanted to tell God he was sorry for all the things he had done wrong and all the things that he hadn't done. I listened as he struggled through his pain and labored breathing to make his confession. I prayed with him, and gave him absolution. He stayed quite agitated until I told him he was forgiven and that he could rest now and go with a heart redeemed by Christ. He settled down and though his breathing was still labored, there was a look of peace on his face. I didn't know his name or anything about him. I know that God had led me to his room because this man, this child of God wanted to repent. He wanted to take off his mortal rags of pain, and shame, and sin and put on the robes of immortality. In looking at his face after his confession and absolution, I could visibly see his transformation and his acceptance of God's forgiveness.

Then I went to Ruth's room. She was sleeping fitfully and quite heavily sedated. I prayed over her, gave her absolution and a blessing, and spent time with her cousin who had been at her side throughout this last battle. She talked about their childhood together, how they had drifted apart for twenty or thirty years, but had come back together and spent the last twenty years enjoying being together again. Ruth went home to be with the Lord later that night.

As I left her room, another woman, probably in her late eighties or early nineties, came out into the hall and asked me if I could visit her husband who had just fallen asleep and say a prayer for him. George was at peace. I prayed for him and commended his soul to God. His wife was amazing. She was happy he wasn't suffering anymore and was grateful that he hadn't had a prolonged illness. We spoke for about twenty minutes while the nurses were waiting to take care of his earthly remains. When I was leaving, I asked her if she had anyone coming to be with her and she told me she lived at Masonicare and her friend and neighbor would be up in a few moments to walk her back to her apartment. She thanked me

for prayers and told me she was grateful that she and her husband had spent over 60 years together here and that she wouldn't have to wait too long until they would be together for eternity. She had no doubt about her faith or about God's promise to her through Christ.

Today would have been my mother's 97<sup>th</sup> birthday. She was born on September 29, 1920 in Erie, PA. She passed away in 1994, when my daughter Miche was still an infant. We had visited her at Masonicare where she had moved into the skilled nursing facility due to her need for round the clock care due to complications from diabetes. She held Miche for a while, and my son Thomas who had just turned four played on the floor at her feet. Pat and I both remarked on how she looked better than she had for long time. After we left, Fr. Martin from our Church paid her a pastoral visit and brought her communion. During their conversation, he asked her how she was doing and she told him that she was happy and at peace. She had seen and held all her grandchildren and was ready to go anytime. A few hours later, we received the call from Masonicare that when the nurses did their evening rounds to check her blood sugar she had passed. They were as surprised as we were because she had been doing so well. She, too, had taken off the rags of mortality and been clothed in the robes of immortality.

St. Paul tells us, *“He has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* Death no longer has dominion over us. Our biological existence no longer controls our soul. Christ, through His death upon the Cross, has opened for us the gates of light and life eternal.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul declares, *“For as in Adam, all die; even so, in Christ shall all be made alive;”* and further, *“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”* The promise of new and eternal life in Christ overcoming

the finality and emptiness of the grave. This is why our Lord set aside His heavenly crown, came down from heaven, and was made man. He came so he could endure the pains and trials of earthly life, of human life. He gave up his eternal substance and being so he could take on our earthly finite existence. He was tortured, crucified, and died like any other man so that when He overcome and destroyed death, he could destroy it for all other men. When he stood before Pilate and Pilate asked Him if he was a King, he told him his Kingdom was not of this world. Yet, two thousand years later, we know that Jesus Christ is the King and is seated upon His throne at the right hand of the Father, majestic in His Eternal Glory.

In the prayers for the dying, we pray,

*“Acknowledge, we humbly beseech thee, a sheep of thine own fold, a lamb of thine own flock, a sinner of thine own redeeming. Receive him into the arms of thy mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light. Amen.”*

The promise of Christ is not an empty or false promise. I was privileged to see it in my mother, in Ruth, in George, and in the man whose name I didn't learn. They all stood at the threshold of darkness and in that final revelation felt the peace that we hear of every Sunday – that peace of God which passes all understanding.

We live in sure and certain hope of the resurrection. In the words from the book of Job, *“For I know that my Redeemer liveth; and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though worms may destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”*

+In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.