

Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Cornelius, a Gentile, was the centurion in command of the Italian cohort stationed at Caesarea. This man was visited by an angel who told him to send for Peter who was in Joppa. As his messengers were approaching the city, Peter had a vision, which abolished the difference between what was clean and unclean and made it acceptable for him to associate with Gentiles. Then the Spirit ordered Peter to go with the messengers. He did so willingly and entered the home of Cornelius where he addressed the whole household, which included the extended family and servants or slaves.⁵ Today's selection is part of that speech in which Peter summarized Jesus' life, death and resurrection. As he concluded the instruction, the Holy Spirit fell on Cornelius and all his household and conferred upon them the gift of tongues. Then Peter baptized them. This was significant because they were the first Gentiles to be baptized. This took place about 9 years after the death of Christ.¹⁴

³⁴Peter proceeded to speak and said:

³⁷"You know what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, John's baptism of Jesus is taken as the starting point of the public ministry of Jesus.⁶

³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. This was done when Jesus was baptized by John.¹ The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in visible form like a dove and a voice from heaven was heard to say: "You are my beloved son. On you my favor rests." This manifestation made it clear that Jesus was the Messiah.⁵ Jesus was actually anointed by the Holy Spirit from the beginning of his human existence, though the MANIFESTATION of this fact takes place only progressively. Thus the whole life of Jesus Christ makes manifest how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power.⁷ (CCC 486) He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, That Peter attributes such oppression to the devil strengthens the image of the kingdom of God as a rule that must do battle with a counter-kingdom run by Satan and his demonic minions.⁶ for God was with him. In the OT, whenever the phrase "God was with him" was used, it always meant an active presence. When God was with David he was able to conquer Israel's enemies. When "God is with" Jesus, he is able to free Israel from the "grip of the devil."⁵

³⁹We are witnesses of all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. This refers to all the things done by Jesus during his ministry which started in Galilee in the north and included the events of his death and resurrection which took place near Jerusalem in the south.⁶

⁴⁰They put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This is a figurative expression for crucifixion.³ This man God raised on the third day This had become the usual way of referring to the Lord's Resurrection.² Our passage strongly shows that the Resurrection is the basic doctrine and proof of the truth of the Christian faith. We are told in 1 Corinthians

that if Christ has not risen, then our preaching is in vain, and our faith is worthless.⁴ and granted that he be visible,

⁴¹not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. The eating and drinking prove that he was really alive as a ghost does not eat and drink.¹⁵ The glorified body of Jesus was no longer in need of food but was still able and willing to partake of it for the sake of the brethren.³

⁴²He commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. Men will appear before Christ twice to render an account of their lives. The first judgment will take place at the very moment of death in a particular judgment and it results in: 1. the soul's entrance into heaven immediately or 2. the soul's entrance into hell or 3. the soul's entrance into heaven later through a period of purification in purgatory.⁷ (CCC 1022) Purgatory has been the consistent teaching of the church. Prayers for the dead and the consequent doctrine of purgatory has been practiced by the Jews of the time of the Maccabees and is even retained by Orthodox Jews today, for they recite a prayer known as the "Mourner's Kaddish" for eleven months after the death of a loved one so that the loved one may be purified. It was not the Catholic Church that added the doctrine of purgatory, rather, any change in the original teaching has taken place in the Protestant churches, which rejected a doctrine that had always been believed by Jews and Christians. *It is interesting to note that there is graffiti in the catacombs where Christians recorded prayers for the dead during the persecutions of the first three centuries. Also, some of the earliest Christian writings outside the New Testament, like the "Acts of Paul and Thecla" and "The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity", both written during the second century, also refer to the Christian practice of praying for the dead. In the fourth century, Monica, the mother of Augustine, asked her son to remember her soul in his masses.*¹⁸ The Last Judgment will take place after the resurrection of all the dead. Christ will come "in his glory, and all the angels with him. (Mt. 25:31) Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.(Mt. 25:31-32) And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.⁷ (CCC 1038) Full right to pass definitive judgment on the works and hearts of men belongs to Jesus as the Redeemer of the world.⁷ (CCC 679) At that time all people, body and soul, will go either to heaven or to hell for all eternity.⁷ (CCC 997-998)

⁴³To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name." Forgiveness comes through the invocation of Christ's name in baptism.¹ As Peter finished preaching, the Holy Spirit descended upon all those who were listening. Peter then baptized them and they then received the forgiveness of sins.⁵ The name is the authority. Jesus was given full authority by His Father and He gave that authority to the apostles and their successors. The ambassador speaks in the "name" of the one whom he represents. Remember the old police shows where they would say, "Stop in the name of the law"? The policeman was invoking the authority which he represented.¹⁵

Colossians:3:1-4

Brothers and sisters:

1If then you were raised with Christ, By his death and resurrection the Son of God frees us from the power of Satan and of death. By Baptism men are grafted into the paschal mystery of Christ; they die with him, are buried with him, and rise with him. In other words, Christians have been raised to a new kind of life, a supernatural life, whereby they share, even while on earth, in the glorious life of the risen Jesus. This life is at present spiritual and hidden, but when our Lord comes again in glory, it will become manifest and glorious.⁸

Another way of putting this is “already, but not yet!” Christ’s reign is already victorious, but it is not yet fully visible to us.¹¹ **seek what is above,** This means the things of God.⁵ This also involves not a lesser, but a greater commitment to working with all men to build a world that is more human.(Gaudium et spes.) Work, family relationships, social involvements — every aspect of human affairs — should be approached in a spirit of faith and done perfectly, out of love.⁸ **where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.** Taken from Psalm 110:1, this shows Christ’s position of Lordship and complete victory.¹⁵

2Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. Many people today don’t believe that heaven exists. That denial accounts for all the aimlessness in modern life and culture. We do believe in heaven and it is wise to keep one’s eyes on our intended destination. Christianity is, as a consequence, end oriented. We look to heaven to keep our bearings straight.⁵

3For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Ordinary life, everyday interests, the desire to be better and to serve others without seeking public recognition of one’s merits — all this makes for holiness if done for love of God. A simple life “hid with Christ in God” is so important that Jesus himself chose to spend the greater part of his life on earth living like an ordinary person; he was the son of a tradesman. The supernatural value of our life does not depend on accomplishing great undertakings but rather, is found in the faithful acceptance of God’s will in welcoming generously the opportunities for small, daily sacrifice.⁸

4When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory. Our virtues will be revealed only at the final judgment when the merit we’ve gained by grace will become our heavenly glory.⁵

John 20:1-9

The Gospel tells us nothing of Jesus’ appearance to His mother, but Christian tradition takes it for granted: the Doctors of the Church in general and the body of the faithful have always believed that after His Resurrection our Lord appeared first to His Mother.¹³ The best evidence for the truth of this ancient Christian tradition is that it is not conceivable that Mary would have left others to attend to Jesus in the tomb if she believed him to be still there. The reasoning is that the Blessed Mother did not go to the tomb on Easter morning because she knew that her son had already left it.¹⁴

1On the first day of the week, The Sabbath is celebrated on Saturday so the first day of the Jewish week is Sunday.¹³ **Mary of Magdala** This was the woman from whom Jesus

expelled seven demons. She was a witness to the crucifixion and the burial of Christ.¹⁷ **came to the tomb early in the morning, while it was still dark, and saw the stone removed from the tomb.** The mouth of the tomb was sealed either with a disc-shaped stone that ran in an inclined groove in front of the cave or with a boulder that fell into the access hole beneath it. Either way, the stone was extremely difficult to move once it was in place.¹³

2So she ran and went to Simon Peter and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, This refers to John.⁵ **and told them,** St. Thomas Aquinas called Mary Magdalene “the apostle to the Apostles”. Just as a woman had announced the words of death to the first man, so also a woman was the first to announce to the Apostles the words of life.¹⁶ **“They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we don’t know where they put him.”** The disappearance of Jesus is the first indication that he has risen as he said. Mary’s phrase, “we don’t know” would presume that she had come to the tomb with other women.⁹

3So Peter and the other disciple went out and came to the tomb.

4They both ran, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter and arrived at the tomb first; John is the younger and swifter of the two.¹¹

5he bent down and saw the burial cloths there, Christ left his grave-clothes behind him there; what clothes he appeared in to his disciples we are not told, but he never appeared in his grave-clothes as ghosts are supposed to do. No, he laid them aside because he rose to die no more.¹³ **but did not go in.** John defers to Peter by letting him enter the tomb first. This is more than a polite gesture, as it reflects his deference to the preeminent honor and authority that Jesus has bestowed on Simon. Allegorically, John Scotus Erigena suggests that the tomb is the Sacred Scriptures. Peter is faith, which is the first thing we bring to its pages, and John is understanding, which afterward enters and penetrates their meaning more deeply.⁹

6When Simon Peter arrived after him, he went into the tomb and saw the burial cloths there, **7and the cloth that had covered his head, not with the burial cloths but rolled up in a separate place.** This is corroborating evidence of the Resurrection. No thief would have taken the time to unwrap Jesus’ corpse and fold his burial clothes neatly in the tomb. In any case, the grave robbers of antiquity usually stole the expensive linens and left the body behind, not the other way around.⁹ Tim Gray writes of an Italian priest, Don Antonio Persili, who has made a lifetime study of this short section of the Gospel of John and he suggests that the more accurate translation would be that Peter entered the tomb and saw the winding cloth flattened out and the head-cloth, which had been around Jesus’ head, not flattened out like the winding cloth, but on the contrary, curving around in a unique position. This would suggest that the body, which had formerly been covered by the cloths, had disappeared from within them –without disturbing them! This would explain why John SAW SOMETHING and believed that Jesus had RISEN rather than simply having been removed from the tomb by someone else. Tim Gray goes on to say that the Greek in fact states that Peter and John found the bodily wrappings EMPTY BUT UNDISTURBED.⁵ In studying the Shroud of

Turin, scientists determined that the man of the shroud was lying on his back with the body pressing against the cloth whereas only the weight of the cloth came in contact with the top of the body, thus producing unequal pressures that made it impossible to duplicate. It was also found that the cloth had to be removed other than by natural means, since blood clots would have smeared or broken, especially at the back area where maximum pressure existed. The scientists claimed that the body was not moved, unwrapped or rewrapped.¹²

8Then the other disciple also went in, the one who had arrived at the tomb first, and he saw and believed. This is an eyewitness account by John, the writer of this Gospel.¹¹

9For they did not yet understand The Holy Spirit had not yet come to enlighten the church concerning the divine mysteries so it should not cause surprise that the disciples were so slow in coming to a realization of the resurrection.³ the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead. Some of these scripture references are: 1) Isaac was for three days under a death sentence until God intervened to give him back alive to Abraham on the third day. This was a historical preview of Jesus rising to new life after obeying his Father unto death. 2) The experience of Jonah coming forth from a whale after three days in its stomach foreshadows Christ emerging from the grave after three days in the earth. 3) Hosea depicts Israel's restoration from exile as a third-day resurrection. Since the Messiah represents Israel in the fullest sense, embodying both its vocation and destiny, Christ's own resurrection initiates the resurrection of Israel from a state of spiritual death.¹⁰

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Acts of the Apostles," (2) "The Navarre Bible: Acts Of The Apostles," (3) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (4) "The Bread of Life: Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (5) Commentary Notes of Tim Gray, (6) "The Acts of the Apostles," by Luke Timothy Johnson, (7) "The Catechism of the Catholic Church," (8) "The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles," (9) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John," (10) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of Luke," (11) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 2002" by Aelred R. Rosser, (12) "Relics" by Joan Carroll Cruz, (13) "Catholic Bible Study: John" by Stephen K. Ray, (14) "The Founding of Christendom" by Warren H. Carroll, (15) The St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, (16) "The Apostles" by Pope Benedict XVI, (17) "Dictionary of the Bible" by John L. McKenzie, S.J., and (18) "Catholic Answers Online: Purgatory".

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.