

The Path to Resurrection

As we rejoice in the resurrection of our Lord from the dead, and consider how marvelous this event was, I would like to pause with you and think of how He arrived at that very moment. This is of great importance, because it is instructive of how you and I will reach our own place of resurrection.

I want to first state, as forthrightly as I can, that there is no shortcut to the open tomb. We see the brilliant light of the sun illuminating the dark recesses of the cave wherein the Lord's dead body was placed. We feel the gentleness of a spring breeze, laden with the aromas of the surrounding gardens, making its way inside to refresh the heavy air of that still place of death. We can hear the pleasant sounds of bird calls celebrating the dawn from the branches of the olive trees in their early greenery. But the way to this scene of relief, this place of profound and lasting peace, of unrestrained triumph and victory, was attained only by the like proportion of suffering and death. And for us, it means the same. We can have no eyes to behold the resurrection, to take in its monumental significance, unless we have walked with our Lord along those darkened paths which establish for us its absolute contrast. *They [alone] that sow in tears shall [indeed] reap in joy* (Psalm 126:5).

I'm pressing this point because I don't want any of us to miss the significance of what happened on that morning which we now commemorate. I want us to do more than have a vague sense of its importance. I don't want us to quit until we are sure we've exhausted our capabilities in appreciating this day and bearing witness to its momentousness. We will only be limited by an incapacity which is the consequence of any distance between ourselves and our Lord which has characterized our lives.

The disciples deserve plenty of understanding on Easter day. Think of the trauma they had endured, and of the intense emotions which gripped them, the most severe emotions to which humanity can be subject: grief, the guilt of their own miserable failure, the betrayal of Christ by one of their own number, the lurid and horrifying images of their Lord's torture and crucifixion which flooded their minds, fear of discovery and reprisal. It doesn't get much worse. So it shouldn't surprise us that they doubted the testimony of the brave women who first encountered the resurrection, and even continued to harbor lingering doubts. Only gradually did they permit their misgivings to turn to joy.

But we have the hindsight of Scripture which places before us the entire span of the story. We are deprived of their uncertainty. The mystery which they faced is for us solved. There still remains for us, however, a duty. It is the entering into a dimension with which the disciples were utterly familiar: that of day-to-day companionship with the Lord upon that long and hard road

which He had walked. When, following the resurrection, they were set free from the power of fear and unbelief, they fully rejoiced in the significance of what they now were able to completely comprehend. And when within a few short weeks they received the pouring forth of God's Spirit at Pentecost, they became transformed men. The pieces of that great puzzle which had been their three year discipleship to this One whom they had both grown to adore as a Man, and worship as God incarnate, began to wonderfully come together.

It is in your Christian life —my Christian life— that we repeat that experience of discipleship, for the Lord wishes nothing less for us than He did for those who walked alongside Him in intimate, personal contact. As He taught them through every circumstance, so He intends to teach us. As He lovingly but determinedly exposed their imperfections, in order to rid them of all things hindering their spiritual progress, so He desires to do with us. The process is deeper and deeper, farther in and farther in, more and more profound, moment by moment, year by year, with every circumstance utilized toward that end, with a very definite goal in mind: [that] *we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, [be] transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord* (2 Cor 3:18).

There is no shortcut to the empty tomb. The colors of resurrection life that streamed forth from that place of darkness cannot be artificially brightened. The sensations of change, of transformation, cannot be falsified and faked. There are none who can lay claim to witnessing that scene in its actuality other than those who have arrived there by the same means which qualified our Lord and His disciples for that greatest of all moments.

So, what are we to do? Let us embrace the cost of discipleship. Let us make sure we understand what's involved, and not shortchange ourselves by imagining that we can get away with less than what's required. If there is distance between us and that white-robed figure who moves relentlessly ever onward before us, let us hurry to catch up. Let Him not get out of our sight. We dare not be absent at the foot of His cross, nor do we wish to miss one glorious moment of His triumphal rising from the dead.

Of all commitments in life, there is none which exceeds the importance of this one.

The consequence will be that we will be able finally to proclaim from the depths of our heart, together with all upon earth who have known Him intimately: "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!"

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.