

Our first reading this morning is the first Christian sermon, preached by the man whom Jesus called “the rock,” on which he would build his Church, the man we consider the first pope. I think it is also the model for all Christian sermons, because it is the very essence of the Gospel... It is very simple. It makes just two points: a fact and the life-changing consequences of that fact.

The fact is the fact of Jesus Christ: *that* he is and *who* he is, and that he lived and died and rose from the dead. And that last part is the truly distinctive one—for no human being ever rose from the dead with a new immortal body. That is the essential fact of Christianity.

Christianity is not a philosophy, a set of ideas and values. It is a **fact**, a literal, historical fact. Peter says that he and the other disciples were literal eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians that there were 500 disciples who saw Jesus after his resurrection, and he invited them to check it out, to interview those witnesses. Now, you might have a few people who claim to see little green men from a flying saucer, or Elvis having a latte at Starbucks, but never *five hundred* at once. The Resurrection is not a myth or a fiction or an ideal; it is a fact.

And that fact makes all the difference in the world. If it didn't really happen, if the bones of the dead Jesus were to be discovered in some tomb in Palestine tomorrow, all of Christianity would be dead forever. There would be nothing left. The whole thing would collapse because its foundation would be gone. “The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord,” says the hymn. As St. Paul said in his letter to the Corinthians, some of whom were doubting the literal resurrection of Jesus: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished...”

If for *this life only* we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all.” (15:1-19)

Why? Why does the fact of Easter, the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, make a total difference in our lives? Because it's not just a fact about the *past*, but about the *present*. We believe not just that Jesus *rose*, in the past some 2000 years ago, but that he *is risen*, in the present. He is alive, now, today. You can meet him. You can have a personal relationship with him, a relationship of faith and trust and hope. You can pray to him. He's not deaf! He is alive. You can even eat his Body and drink his Blood, in the Eucharist.

What difference does the Resurrection make to our lives? A total difference in time and an infinite difference in eternity. A total difference in time, in our lives in this world, because Jesus the Christ is the Lord of everything in our lives. If he is not the Lord of everything, then he is the Lord of nothing. He is not just one among many; he is not just our friend and our model and our Master; he is our **God**.

And the difference he makes to the next life is also total. He is our Savior. The name “Jesus” *means* “Savior.” Savior from what? From bad politics? From depression? From poverty? No, from sin and death and hell.

And you can't be saved by a dead savior. A corpse cannot conquer death for you. A corpse cannot conquer sin for you. A corpse cannot bar the door to hell and open the door to heaven for you. A corpse cannot send his Holy Spirit into your soul and give you the supernatural gifts of faith and hope and love. A corpse cannot reconcile you to God.

There are only two possibilities: either Jesus is a corpse or he is alive. And if he is alive, if he rose from the dead, then he is more than any mere human; he is God. The Resurrection is the supreme miracle, the miracle that proves that he is God, that the God who watches over every aspect of our lives, is also the God who loves us so much that he died to save us from ourselves. And if this Jesus is more than a corpse and a memory, then when we die, we will be more than a corpse and a memory. He conquered not only his own death, but our death as well. That is why St. Paul wrote: “We do not you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve like the rest, who have no hope.” (I Thess. 4:13) And that hope is not just a wish, an optimism; it is God’s solemn promise; it is the “sure and certain hope of the resurrection.”

That changes everything! We still have to live and fight and suffer and put one foot in front of the other each day, just as unbelievers do. But it makes all the difference in the world if we do that in hope or in despair. We are all going to die, but for us believers, death is the door to life; as Paul said in our second reading today, death goes *up* into the light; for unbelievers, death goes *down*, into darkness. And the difference between up and down, between light and darkness, is total. That is the difference Easter makes to us today, to every single step of our lives.

And that is precisely why we sing the beautiful Psalm 118 today, Easter Sunday: “This the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.”