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The Lord is Risen!

Sermon, Easter Sunday, April 24, 2011

Grace Episcopal Church, Elmira, NY

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Acts 10:34-43, Psalm 118:1-2,14-24, Colossians 3:1-4, John 20:1-18

The Lord is risen. The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

This is the day of gladness and rejoicing when Jesus Christ is risen from the dead. Christ gave himself for us that we might have eternal life in him. He died and rose again so that we might live.

On the altar today you see the traditional Easter lilies, but you also see some additions that are not so traditional. There are poinsettias up by the cross. They are there to remind us of Christmas, where it all began. Jesus lives outside of time, in the eternal Now of God. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave; and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.¹ In order to redeem us, Jesus became one of us. The poinsettias remind us that the Incarnation and Resurrection are inextricably linked. The purpose of the Incarnation was so that Jesus' death and resurrection could happen. Without being incarnate, he could not die; and without dying he could not live again and thus bring to all of us the gift of eternal life. So the flowers today are symbols: lilies for the beauty and purity of Mary, the Mother of God, who said "Yes" to God; purple salvia for the Passion, Jesus' trial and suffering; poinsettias for the incarnation and also the red color for the Blood poured out for us; and finally the lilies again, their grace and sweet scent part of our rejoicing, their deep trumpets hiding the mystery of the most important gift that humanity has ever received.

What is our responsibility in this? Jesus offered his life, his body and his blood for us. How do we accept this gift? If we receive the gift of a child, it is our responsibility to nurture, educate, protect, and love that child. Jesus gave us the gift of himself, his body in the Sacrament. How do we receive this?

First, we can allow him into our lives, follow his teaching: to love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and to love your neighbor as yourself; to assist the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick, bury the dead, and console the sorrowing; not to give way to anger, nurse a grudge, lie in order to deceive, or return evil for evil; to do no wrong to anyone, to bear patiently wrongs done to yourself, and to love your enemies.² So we try as best we can to live our lives as Jesus showed us by his example. This is one way we can gratefully receive his gift.

¹ Phillipians 2:7-8

² Rule of Benedict, Chapter 4

A second way is that we can pray, talk to him, talk to Jesus, to Father God, to the Holy Spirit. Along with prayer, talking to God, spend some time listening. The best prayer is a two-way conversation. Centering prayer, sitting in the silence, is an excellent way to quiet yourself and listen to God. A Centering Prayer Group meets here every Tuesday afternoon at 5:30 PM. Let God, the divine presence, be part of your life. Invite Jesus into your heart.

Third – this is where you probably expect me to say, “Come to church.” No, I am not going to say that. We are delighted that you are here today; this is very excellent. Some of us value regular experience at the altar, others of us attend only occasionally for many different reasons. That is OK. However, I invite you to consider Grace Church. The Church is where you can connect with God, with Jesus, in a more tangible way. Grace Church is here any time you want it or need it: to attend one of our wonderful liturgies, to receive Communion, for counsel and support in difficult times, to baptize your children, to marry your sons and daughters, and to bury your dead. Grace Church needs your support and contributions. Please help us to continue to be here for you, to support your relationship with God, your Creator, Redeemer, and Friend.

So we give to Jesus as he has given to us. We give him our lives, our prayers, our struggles, our substance, our very being.

In a few minutes we will receive his gift in tangible form: the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ. The body that we will receive is the body of the child in the stable, the body that endured suffering on the cross, the body that is risen and glorified. This body encompasses all of human nature, as the resurrection encompasses the whole world and transfigures it. Jesus’ historical body, contained in a point of space and a moment of time, in reality already contained all space and all time in itself. This was the Body of a divine person assuming our finiteness, our whole condition of separation and death in order to fill it all with his Light.³

The Magi adored this body in the manger, now it is upon the altar. This is the same body that was covered in blood, pierced by a spear, pouring forth the saving streams of blood and water for the whole world. Christ soared up from the depths of the abyss in dazzling light, and leaving his light for us, he went on up to his throne in heaven.⁴ His light illumines the whole world so that we may walk in his light and in his love forever.

And now to Him whose Power working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine, to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus, forever and ever. Amen.⁵

³ Clément, Olivier, *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, New City Press, Hyde Park, NY, 1993, pp. 109-110.

⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily on First Corinthians* in *The Roots of Christian Mysticism*, p. 110.

⁵ Ephesians 3:20-21