

Homily Easter 2013: 31 Mar 2013: HT-W/XII-PC

Nowadays, one of the fastest growing religious groups is the unaffiliated, the so-called "nones" (spelled n-o-n-e-s). Nones do not identify w/ any denomination, Christian or otherwise. If you try to explain the Resurrection to them, they are apt to regard it as nonsense. Just think: there was this Jewish carpenter who lived 2000 years ago; he started preaching and attracted a following; but he ran afoul of the authorities who had him killed; he was buried, but 3 days later he came to life and appeared to his disciples; after 40 days he zoomed up to heaven. Now at first hearing an unbeliever is probably going to dismiss this as superstitious hogwash.

It shouldn't surprise us that nones don't believe in the resurrection. In fact, the apostles thought it was nonsense too, when they first heard about it. As Luke tells it, when the women reported the event to the apostles, "their story seemed like nonsense, and the apostles did not believe them." For what it's worth, women reported the resurrection, and the apostles were all men--the majority of nones are men as well. The initial skepticism of the disciples about the resurrection is undeniable: Mark says they didn't believe the reports until Jesus appeared to them; Matthew notes that some doubted even when they did see him; John gives us doubting Thomas the apostle as the personification of incredulity.

The Resurrection of its very nature sounds incredible. In our world the finality of death is an iron law of existence which admits of no exceptions. The dead and buried don't come back to life, except in zombie movies. Sure, there are those cases where folks presumed dead have really lapsed into a state of deep unconsciousness, and then revived. But with Jesus, his death and burial make this sort of pseudo-resurrection impossible: his demise was a matter of public record; after dying he was stabbed in the heart w/ a lance for good measure; then his body was wrapped up tight in burial cloths and his tomb was sealed with a giant stone. The idea that after all that and a 3 day confinement in the grave he somehow naturally revived and escaped defies all natural explanation. The resurrection of the Lord is incredible because it is so unique; it's absolutely unparalleled in human experience. Moreover, it is a singularity which was observed by only a small circle of witnesses: by Paul's count, less than 600, all of whom are now dead.

In view of the Resurrection's innate incredibility, the gospel shows how people's understandable reluctance to believe is overcome. Those who heed the report of the resurrection then share the good news w/ the rest of the believers. Often they're ordered to do so by the Lord or an angel. As a result there's a reunion of the whole church at Easter, where the scattered disciples come home and share their stories of the risen Lord.

One lesson can be quickly drawn from this: belief in the risen Lord draws us into the family of faith that is the church. When those first witnesses of the resurrection got the good news, they ran back home to tell the other disciples. That upper room where the first believers assembled

became a kind of religious crucible. And it was in the midst of that gathering that the risen Lord appeared. The idea here is that the church is where Christian faith is nourished and strengthened. So also for us today, belief in Jesus should draw us into the community of believers that is the church. Here our mutual sharing of faith in word and witness reinforces our common confession. Here the risen Lord is fully present in power: speaking to us in the Scriptures, nourishing us in the Sacrament, praying w/ us in the liturgy.

Second, the ingathering of the believers into the church gives rise to her mission to the world. The disciples who came together to celebrate the resurrection, then went out to proclaim the good news to everyone else. I compared the church with a crucible. Perhaps a better metaphor is a reactor. In the church all sorts of diverse elements are blended together--bread and wine, water and oil, candles and incense, prayer and sacrament, to say nothing of the wonderfully diverse conglomeration of utterly unique individuals who comprise her membership. And thru the catalyzing power of the Holy Spirit, this reactor generates a tremendous explosion of grace which has the potential to change the world: to illuminate the earth with the radiant light of the Gospel truth and warm it with the fire of God's love.

So on this Easter Sunday, I invite everyone, especially those whose faith may have grown cold, to come back home where the resurrection is believed, proclaimed, and celebrated. Please forgive the sins of us already here; remember those first witnesses of the resurrection had to endure to the hardheaded apostles, until the good Lord set them straight. Here's the place where our faith in the good news is strengthened, refined, and made ready for proclamation. Let's join together, brothers and sisters, in our common celebration that Jesus Christ is risen today. Amen. Alleluia!