

EASTER “A” 2020

U.S. News & World Report has a section called “*News You Can Use*,” which implies that there is a lot of news you can’t use. That’s true. We live in an information society. In fact, there is a glut of information—much of which we really don’t need to know. So I don’t want to waste your time on any useless information. Rather, tonight (today) I would like to speak about “*News You Can Use*”—*the Good News of Easter*.

And I want to get right to the point. I feel like the chicken that decided to lay an egg on the California freeway. The chicken says, “*Here’s how you do it. You lay it on the line and you do it in a hurry!*” That’s what I want to do. I want to lay it on the line, and do it in a hurry.

The two questions I want to pose to you on this Feast of the Resurrection of Jesus are: What does the Resurrection mean? And why does it matter?

Let’s examine the first question: what does the Resurrection mean? It means three things.

First, the Resurrection means that Jesus is who He claims to be. Jesus made some outrageous claims when He was here on earth. He said things like, “*I’m God.... I’m perfect ... I am the way, the truth and the life...I’m the only way to heaven ... I’m the Savior of the world...*”

Through the ages, many skeptics have said that Jesus was just a great teacher or a prophet or a reformer, or a really good man.

The problem is: you can't say any of those things about Jesus because Jesus didn't say that He was any one of those things. Jesus stated that He is God. So, Jesus is either the greatest lunatic who ever lived—thinking He is God when He really isn't; or He is the greatest liar who ever lived—knowing that he is not God, but lied to people on the most critical issue of all—telling them He was God and they should follow Him; or He is truly the Lord. In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis masterfully demonstrates that the first two possibilities—lunatic and liar—just don't hold any water. If you examine the historical evidence of the Gospels, the cogency, the clarity, the consistency, the wisdom, winsomeness and compassion of Jesus' words, deeds and character dispel any possibility that Jesus was a lunatic or a liar.

So, that leaves only one more possibility, and that is, Jesus truly is the Lord, the Son of the Living God. And, if Jesus is God, then everything He says is true and necessary for our salvation. And that brings us to the second thing that the Resurrection means.

Second, the Resurrection means that Jesus has the power He claims to have. Over one third of the Gospels recount the incredible miracles that Jesus performed during his life. Now Jesus performed these miracles to back up His claim that He is God. For example, do you remember the miracle of the healing of the young paralytic man? That healing started when Jesus told the young man that his sins were forgiven. In response to the scorn and mockery of the Pharisees who said that only God could forgive sins, Jesus told them, "*Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?* But for

you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins” he said to the paralyzed man, “Get up, take your mat and go home.” Then the man got up and went home.” The physical miracle pointed to the more important spiritual truth that Jesus truly is God. Jesus promised that He would die and rise from the dead to save us. And Jesus did just that. In fact, the Resurrection is the last and the greatest miracle that proves that Jesus is God and has the power He claims to have.

Third, the resurrection proves that Jesus does what He promises to do. If the Resurrection proves that Jesus is who He claims to be—the all-powerful God in human nature—and if the Resurrection proves that Jesus has the power He claims to have—then logically, it follows that Jesus can do what He promises to do.

Now the second question I pose to you: why does the Resurrection matter? What difference does it make for us in Simi Valley in 2020? Because Jesus is who He claims to be and because He has the power He claims to have and because Jesus does what He promises to do, the Resurrection means three incredible things for us.

First, our past can be forgiven. As a priest, I have met so many people who couldn’t get on with the present and the future of their lives because they were stuck in the past. Some guilt or regret or something has tied them down. Sometimes it’s a former relationship and they are letting it mess up their current relationship. They are running around with all this emotional garbage, wondering why they’re not happy. We don’t have to live this way.

Colossians 3:14 says, “*He has forgiven all our sins and canceled every record of the debt we owed. Christ has done away with it by nailing it to the cross.*” This verse is God’s divine pardon program. Jesus paid for our guilt. That means we don’t have to pay for it. Jesus nailed our sins and guilt to the cross so that we can quit nailing ourselves to the cross. He was hung for our hang ups.

Also Jesus wants to cancel all our debts. Once a debt is paid, you forget it. God says He wants to cancel every record of all debts we owe— emotional debts, relational debts, the spiritual debts of sins—all canceled by the grace Jesus poured forth from the cross—the grace we receive through the Sacraments of Baptism and regular Confession. Once God has forgiven it, we can forget it.

Brothers and sisters, even if there were no such thing as a Heaven or a Hell —and there is—but even if they didn’t exist, it would be worth it to become a Christian just to have a clear conscience, just to know that we are free from everything we have ever done wrong. We don’t have to carry around all that heavy baggage of guilt. It’s unnecessary.

Romans 8:1 tells us, “*There is no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ.*” I call this God’s etch-a-sketch verse in the Bible. When I was a child, I had this great toy called an Etch-A-Sketch. The toy was rectangular in shape with a screen and two dials at the bottom that controlled 2 arms within the toy. As you turned the dials one way or the other, you could etch a picture on the screen. If you messed up the picture, you just

flipped the Etch-A-Sketch over, shook it, turned it back over, and you had a clean screen to draw again. In Romans 8:1, God is telling us that He wants to wipe our lives clean. We can walk in life, knowing that every single thing we've ever done wrong can be completely forgiven. Brothers and sisters, Jesus said, "*I didn't come to condemn the world, I came to save it.*" Jesus did not come to rub it in. He came to rub it out. Jesus wants to change us and to give us a new beginning, a clear conscience. The resurrection means that our entire past can be forgiven.

Second, our present problems can be managed. Much of life is unmanageable, especially if you're a parent! I remember reading about Charlie Shedd, an author, who tells a wonderful story on himself: "Before we had kids, I used to travel across the country teaching a lecture I called '*The Ten Commandments for Raising Perfect Kids.*' After he and wife Martha had their first child, he changed the title to, "*Ten Hints for Parents.*" After their second child came, he relabeled the lecture, "*A Few Tentative Suggestions for Fellow Strugglers.*" After the arrival of the third, child he gave up speaking on the topic altogether.

Maturity is when you figure out that you can't have it all figured out.

Maturity is when you realize that you can't manage all that life is going to throw at you. But God can. And that's the Good News. We can't control everything in my life, but God can. So, we want to hook up with God, ask Him for help, and let Him control it.

I talk to people all the time. And the #1 complaint I hear from them is: "*My life is out of control. I feel powerless to change the*

situation... I feel powerless to break a bad habit... I feel powerless to save a relationship... I feel powerless to get out of debt... I feel powerless to manage my time and my schedule.” What we need is a power greater than ourselves. We were never meant to live this life just on our own power. God wants to have a relationship with us to give us His power.

Ephesians 1:20 says, “*How incredibly great is His power to help those who believe Him, the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead.*” The same power that enabled Jesus to rise from the dead will help us rise above our problems. The same power that God used at the resurrection 2,000 years ago can be used in our lives right now.

You don’t know what the future holds. I don’t either. I don’t know what’s going to happen next year, next month, or next week or tomorrow, especially with this coronavirus crisis, and neither do you. But it doesn’t matter. Because even though it’s out of our control, it’s not out of God’s control. God will give us the power to face it. No problem is too big for God. No situation is hopeless if we will turn it over to God.

And third, our future can be secure. The most universal problem we all face is death. Everybody dies. I’m going to die some day, and so are you. Many already have died this year from the flu and this coronavirus. So, only a fool would go through all of life unprepared for something he knows is inevitable. That doesn’t make sense. But sometimes we get so busy in the here and now that we don’t stop to think about what’s going to

come. In fact, most people don't even like to think or talk about death and the hereafter. Just invite your friends over some time, serve them some coffee and pie and say, "*Let's talk about death.*" See what happens.

But, because death is inevitable, we need to talk about it. We're going to spend a trillion times more time on the other side of death than on this side. Here we will spend 70, 80 years or maybe 90 years. This is preschool for what's going to happen in eternity. Because we are going to die some day, we should want to know, "*What's going to happen after I die?*"

God hasn't left us in the dark. John 11: 25 tells us, "*Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'*" Did you hear that? We will never die! And what's heaven going to be like? 1 Corinthians 2:9 says, "*Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him.*" It will be more beautiful, more incredible than anything we can think or imagine. Also, one day, God promises that we will experience the same risen life that Jesus has—body and soul—we will be perfect in every way, and it will be forever. We have this assurance that our future can be secure because Jesus has risen from the dead.

God can do all these things for us. But there is one thing God can't do—and that is this: God can't receive those graces for us. Only we can make that choice. If we just would believe and accept Jesus into our lives, and have a personal relationship with Him, God can do everything He has promised. So,

knowing what the Resurrection means and what a difference it can make in our lives are very important, but they're not enough. We have to want what Our Lord Jesus offers to us. We need to open our hearts and ask Jesus to be the Lord of our lives, and start putting into action this "*News We Can Use—The Good News of Easter!*"