

# Homily for Easter Sunday, April 12, 2020 The Joy of the Resurrection

Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; col 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

**The Resurrection of Jesus is the basis for our own faith.** It becomes the proof of Jesus's divinity and the guarantee of our own resurrection. The fact that it is really believable is shown by supernatural, spiritual experiences in our own lives today. This calls us to a life of obedience in Christ.

**1) The Resurrection of Christ is the basis of our Christian Faith.** This is why we are here, together, albeit electronically, celebrating our faith. The Resurrection of Jesus is the greatest of miracles, for it proves that Jesus is God. That is why St. Paul writes: *"If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain; and your faith is in vain"* (1 Cor 15: 14). *"Jesus is Lord, He is risen!"* (Rom 10:9), was the central theme of the 'preaching' of the apostles, because Jesus had prophesied His Resurrection as a sign of His divinity: *"Tear down this temple and in three days I will build it again"* (Jn 2:19). The founder of no other religion has an empty tomb as Jesus has. I recommend meditative reading of 1 Cor 15. This is where St. Paul defends the resurrection as real as and as explains what it means for us. But this is not just about Jesus!

**2) Because of the Resurrection of Jesus, Easter becomes the guarantee of our own resurrection.** Jesus assured Martha at the tomb of Lazarus: *"I am the Resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me will live even though he dies"* (Jn 11:25-26). Easter is a feast which gives us hope and encouragement in this world of pain, sorrows, disease and tears. It reminds us that life is worth living. It is this faith that gives meaning to our prayers, strength to fight against temptations, and freedom from unnecessary worries and fears. It gives us hope in eternal life forever with God in heaven.

**3. St. Paul showed us this attitude,** when he, in the midst of suffering and persecution, reflected on whether it was better to live or to die:

My eager expectation is that "Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me life is Christ, and death is gain. If I go on living in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. And I do not know which I shall choose. I am caught between the two. I long to depart this life and be with Christ, for that is far better. Yet that I remain in the flesh is more necessary for your benefit" (Phil 1:20-24).

Isn't that wild! That St. Paul didn't really care if he lived or died! But is this just irrational dreaming?

**4. Actual validation in our experience that this spiritual, supernatural world is real.** How wonderful this sounds! Yet how many people today, especially those of the millennial generation, just don't believe that this is really real? How do we look on life? Does our way of looking at things assure us that supernatural reality exists beyond the physical? Is our Catholic faith founded on fact or fantasy? Let me invite you to look over my study sheet on "Evidences of the Supernatural". This for me has been the greatest development in my life, since being a "scientifically formed" youth for whom the spiritual was non-existent.

Two illustrations from my journey: The first was the experience of Dr. Maurice S. Rawlings, M.D. (heart specialist) when he encountered Charlie McKaig, a forty-eight year old mail carrier from LaFayette, GA. McKaig was taking a treadmill test for a heart condition. Suddenly he flatlined and collapsed on the treadmill. Dr. Rawlings described what then happened (See To Hell and Back, Rawlings, pp. 36ff).

They started giving him CPR but he didn't respond. They had to put in a pacemaker. Dr. Rawlings described:

Using a large-bore needle, I entered the big vein under the collar bone, then threaded the pacemaker wire in the right side of the heart and attached the wire to a pulse-generator box to initiate every beat, not missing a stroke.

But blood was spurting everywhere. Whenever I stopped Charlie's eyes would roll up, he would sputter, turn blue, and begin to convulse.

With bare hands, just like you can, I would reach over and start him up again. But this time he was screaming the words, "Don't stop! I'm in hell! I'm in hell!"

"Hallucinations, I thought. Most victims say, "Take your big hands off me, you're breaking my ribs." But he was saying the opposite: "For God's sake, don't stop! Don't stop! Don't you understand? Every time you let go, I'm back in hell!"

When he asked me to pray for him, I felt downright insulted. In fact, I told him to shut up. I said I was a doctor, not a minister and not a psychiatrist. But the nurses gave me that expectant look. What would you do?" That's when I composed a make-believe prayer.

I made him repeat the make-believe prayer word for word to keep him off my back. Meanwhile, I resuscitated with one hand and adjusted the pacemaker with the other. "Say it! Jesus Christ is the Son of God, go on and say it!" I said. "Keep me out of hell, and if I live, I'm on the hook. I'm yours. Go on say it!"

And then a very strange thing happened that changed our lives. A religious conversion experience took place. I (the doctor) had never witnessed one before. He was no longer the wild-eyed, screaming, combative lunatic who had been fighting me for his life. He was relaxed and calm and cooperative. It frightened me. I was shaken by the events. Not only had that make-believe prayer blown out the soul of Charlie McKaig but it backfired and got me too. It was a conviction I cannot express even to this day.

**5. This story really got my attention.** Something spiritual happened to both of these men. Their lives were changed. There are many examples of near-death, out of body experiences. In these, people describe themselves leaving their bodies (which appear to be dead) and travelling to other locations, sometimes on earth, sometimes to heaven, and occasionally to hell. They are able to describe behavior or situations that they could not have known naturally. It would appear that something like themselves (their soul) left their physical body for a period of time and then came back, yet conscious of what they had seen and learned while out of body. These experiences are too numerous to dismiss.

**6. These evidences, among many others, made me realize that something like the resurrection of Jesus, could most certainly be real.** To think that this is just impossible, simply from the point of view of a secular, materialistic philosophic outlook, seems to me to be ignoring real evidence. That is why I believe we need to pay attention and **live the lives of Resurrection people**: Easter gives us the joyful message that we are a "Resurrection people." This means that we are not to lie buried in the tomb of our sins, evil habits, dangerous addictions, despair, discouragement, or doubts, whatever they may be. Instead, we are freed up to live a joyful and peaceful life, constantly experiencing the joy of our Risen Lord in all the events of our lives. If we are right with Jesus, we should not fear death, but even look forward to it.

**7. As a consequence of this evidence, we are called to live new, disciplined lives in the Risen Jesus.** Our awareness of the presence of the Risen Lord in and around us, and the strong conviction of our own resurrection, these can help us to *control our thoughts, desires, words and behavior*. This salutary thought inspires us *to honor our bodies, keeping them holy*, pure and free from evil habits and addictions. It should inspire us to many good works, especially the spiritual and corporal works of mercy (See CCC 2447). Our conviction about the presence of the Risen Lord in our neighbors and in all those with whom we come into contact should encourage us to respect them, and to render them loving, humble and selfless service.

**8. In conclusion**, let us have confidence to rejoice this Easter, when we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, for he makes possible our rising to new life and living this life in the Spirit.

## **Evidences for the Supernatural**

## **Bibliography**

### **1. Evidences from experiences from near death and out-of-body experiences**

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Jeffrey Long, M.D. with Paul Perry, **Evidence of the Afterlife: the science of near death experiences** (This book shares the firsthand accounts of people who have died and lived to tell about it. It reflects the work of the Near Death Experience Research Foundation headed up by radiation oncologist Jeffrey Long and his wife, Jody. See this website which has become the largest NDE research database in the world, world wide data ([www.nderf.org](http://www.nderf.org))).

Todd Burpo, **Heaven is for Real; A Little Boy's Astounding Story of His Trip to Heaven and Back** (Thomas Nelson, 2010). Coulton Burpo, four years old, during a surgery, left his body, saw his parents in different parts of the hospital and found out amazing things in heaven.

Rawlings, Maurice S., M.D., **To Hell and Back: Life After Death – Startling New Evidence** (Thomas Nelson, 1993). Documents the conversion of a non-believing doctor during a resuscitation event. He then researches why more people do not report a negative (going to hell) experience.

Brown, Michael H., **The Other Side** (Spirit Daily Publishing, [www.spiritdaily.com](http://www.spiritdaily.com), 2008) A fascinating book written clearly from the point of view that the soul and supernatural reality are real and how it will really be. Chapter 14 describes what hell and purgatory are reported to be like.

### **2. Evidences from experiences with the demonic; possession, exorcism, etc.**

Amorth, Fr. Gabriele, **An Exorcist Tells His Story** (Ignatius Press, 1999). Look his name up on the internet for recent articles and descriptions of what is currently going on in Italy.

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Fortea, Fr. Jose Antonio, **Interview with an Exorcist: An Insider's Look at the Devil, Demonic Possession, and the Path to Deliverance** (Ascension Press, LLC, 2006). Written by one of the Church's foremost experts on the topic, this book is based on Fr. Jose Antonio Fortea's years of working as an exorcist, his extensive investigations of cases of suspected possessions, and his attendance at hundreds of exorcisms. In this book the reader can better understand the schemes of the Devil, the nature of demonic possession, and the path to deliverance from evil.

### **3. Standard Christian Miracles and Reflections about the Resurrection and the Eucharist**

Morison, Frank, **Who Moved the Stone?** (Lamplighter Books, Zondervan Publishing House, 1930, 1958). This is a classic apologetic on the Resurrection of Jesus. Influenced by skeptic thinkers at the turn of the twentieth century [1900], he set out to prove that the story of Christ's Resurrection was only a myth. His probings, however, led him to discover the validity of the biblical record in a moving, personal way.

**The Eucharistic Miracles of the World** (by the Institute of St. Clement I, Pope and Martyr, in cooperation with the Pontifical Academy Cultorum Martyrum and the Real Presence Eucharistic Education and Adoration Association. This book and the accompanying exhibition provides a wonderful service to the work of the New Evangelization. This book covers all the centuries of the Church, up to the present,

showing evidence of supernatural events related to the Most Holy Eucharist. In our Diocese, a collection of approximately 400 testimonial documentations is owned by St. Joseph's Church in Marshall.

#### **4. Current miracles investigated by science for the canonization of Padre Pio, John Paul II, and Mother Theresa.**

**Padre Pio:** Gemma Di Giorgi was born in 1939 blind, without any pupils in her eyes. Documented by multiple ophthalmologists. After Padre Pio's prayers she was given sight even though her eyes never gained pupils. The healing persevered. Gemma was educated and was even able to read a telephone directory!

**John Paul II:** Floribeth Mora Diaz of Costa Rica described how she said Pope John Paul II cured her of a brain aneurysm when doctors warned she only had a month left to live. After doctors said she had only days to live, Diaz said she began praying to the late pontiff as she clutched a magazine cover baring his portrait. "When I woke up in the morning, I looked at the magazine cover which showed Pope Wojtyla [John Paul II's birth surname] with his arms outstretched," she said. "I felt a deep sense of healing. I heard his voice say to me, 'Get up and don't be afraid,'" she added. "I went to my husband in the kitchen and told him I was cured. I realized little by little the illness had been taken away."

A slew of medical tests confirmed her recovery -- despite there being no medical explanation. Under the guise of a tourist, Diaz was flown to a church-run hospital in Rome, she said, where she was registered under a pseudonym as doctors -- unaware of the potential miracle -- conducted a battery of tests on her in October 2013.

"I was meant to be just a tourist from Costa Rica who had fallen ill while on holiday in Italy," she said of the process. "They [the Vatican] demanded the greatest secrecy. No one was to know who I really was."

**Mother Theresa:** The miracle needed for her canonization involved the curing of a man in Santos, Brazil, with a serious viral brain infection, according to Father Brian Kolodiejchuk "The patient's wife continuously sought the intercession of the Blessed Mother Teresa for her husband," he said in a statement explaining the event. The unidentified man was in a coma and about to undergo an emergency operation when a neurosurgeon "returned to the operating room and found the patient inexplicably awake and without pain," the statement said. The patient made an immediate and full recovery. Despite tests showing that prolonged drug treatment had made him sterile, he went on to have two children, Kolodiejchuk said.

#### **5. Concerning science, issues of creation and Darwinism**

Strobel, Lee, **The Case for a Creator** (Zondervan, 2004). The best summary of the case for a creator in the sense of "intelligent design." Strobel investigates six areas of science, quoting from outstanding authorities for each, to show how scientists themselves recognize that the order we have in the world cannot be explained reasonably without a creative intelligence behind it. He deals with Darwinism, Cosmology, Physics, Astronomy, Biochemistry, Biological Information, and Consciousness. Especially see chapter 11, "The Cumulative Case for a Creator."

Behe, Michael J., **Darwin's Black Box** (Free Press, Simon and Schuster, 1996, 2006). Illustrates problems with the atheistic understanding of creation of Darwin.

Behe, Michael J., **The Edge of Evolution: The Search for the Limits of Darwinism** (Kindle, 2007). Critique also of the methods of argument for the atheistic understanding of evolution.

House, H. Wayne, General Editor, **Intelligent Design 101**. (See here for list of contributors).

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Ross, Hugh, **The Fingerprint of God: Recent Scientific Discoveries Reveal the Unmistakable Identity of the Creator** (Promise Publishing Company, 1989).

Wells, Jonathan, **Icons of Evolution: Science or Myth. Why much of what we teach about evolution is wrong** (Regnery Publishing, 2000).

Wilder-Smith, Dr. A. E., **The Scientific Alternative to Neo-Darwinism Evolutionary Theory**.