

The Power of the Resurrection: Forgiveness and Hope

Having journeyed through another season of Lent and witnessed the profound themes of Holy Week, we gather today trying to understand, yet anew, the meaning of Christ's resurrection. We can, given our human nature, simply recognize that a couple of thousand years ago the Son of God rose from the dead and opened the gates to eternal life. The significance of that event in and of itself provides a reason to rejoice. God promises eternal life. Alleluia! Yet, the event of the resurrection is too powerful to merely leave in the past. The fact of the matter is that the truth of the resurrection event is so large that it transcends time and place and has meaning and power right now; today!

We know that we are growing spiritually when the resurrection of Christ becomes more an event of the present than of the past. It is easy to keep Jesus in history. We can refer to our faith in the past tense and reflect on the gospels and events in Jesus' life as they happened many years ago. This allows us to meditate on God's action in history, but what is its current relevance? The challenge, therefore, is taking our faith from the past and bringing it to the present where it has more of a claim on how we live and what we choose.

The resurrection is ultimately about new life, new directions, new beginnings and new hope. Basically, it is about the dying and rising that happens each day of our lives. Living the resurrection is about finding our way through the growth pains that are part and parcel of our existence. Perhaps some of us have touched this reality this past Lent. Maybe there was an area of our life that needed fine tuning or growth. We all have behaviors and attitudes that are self destructive. Confronting these thorns and working them out brings us to a new level of being and living. We find ourselves enjoying a new freedom and discovering parts of ourselves that we never knew existed. We discover new possibilities and potential.

This is most acutely seen in people who are grieving. When someone experiences a significant loss, life is forever changed. Each day presents new challenges of learning to live without a significant person by your side. The reality of death is never truly resolved and the work of grief is never fully completed. It is a process of growing and becoming that daily shapes my life. The gift of the resurrection brings new possibilities and potential.

Bringing the resurrection from the past to the present means simply this. God's love has triumphed over sin and death. The power of true and perfect love has shown its way through the darkest hour and deepest of pain. The power of God's perfect love is available each and every moment and every day of our lives. And, just as that perfect love triumphed in the past, it can triumph in the present. Nothing can stand in its way, except us.

Often, we are the very thing that stands in the way of happiness and growth. The resurrection tells us that the sky is the limit and all things are possible. The resurrection

tells us that there is always tomorrow and no road is a dead end. The resurrection tells us about the power of God, if only we believe that God is working today, right now, in our lives. The resurrection tells us that God wants only the best for us and is working with us to make that happen. If we see the resurrection as an event of the past then we miss all of the wonderful things God wants to accomplish today.

A young lady named Immaculee Ilibagiza wrote a book entitled, "Left to Tell." The book details her journey through the Rwandan Genocide of 1994 and its impact on her family and friends. This is a must read for any serious person; especially one seeking to discover the hand of God in the events of human life. Immaculee's journey is one of learning about the resurrection.

The Rwandan Genocide basically had its roots in long standing issues between two African tribes. Immaculee and her family happened to belong to the one being persecuted or better yet, eradicated. It was the aim of some of the Hutu's to eliminate every Tutsi from Rwandan soil; regardless of age, sex or status. Thousands and thousands of people, simply because of tribal association, were grossly killed usually by machete. This was an extremely dark time in human history and one over which no one ought to be proud.

Immaculee, a young intelligent college girl at the time managed to escape execution and hid in the very small bathroom of a pastor's home. This bathroom was to be her and six other women for the next four months. These poor women had to contort their bodies, forego normal hygiene and live in the most horrendous of circumstances just for the chance to survive. And, survive they did. What is most remarkable about this journey is the transformation that occurred in Immaculee's relationship with God.

The very thing that kept her going and able to endure the most horrific of circumstances was her faith in God. It was this relationship that sustained her ability to love and eventually led to her ability to personally confront and forgive the very person who killed and mutilated her beloved family. Once again, the innocent are forced to suffer such agonizing pain. One could easily conclude and even justify, at least in the eyes of the world, how such an experience would bring just the opposite to the survivor; intense hatred and anger. But, for Immaculee, it brought love.

This story is a witness to the present power of the resurrection. It is how the power of God's perfect Love can transform and change even the most horrendous of circumstances and bring hope when despair looms large. Living with the present power of the resurrection means that I understand that I do not walk alone; that there is One greater than I journeying with me. Once I embrace this truth, life has a different meaning.

In conclusion, leaving the resurrection in the past is certainly easier and more comfortable. But, once I admit and realize that God desires to make that resurrection alive every day of my life, then things change. Through Christ's resurrection, God promises not only a life to

come but a well spring of resources to deal with whatever life on earth brings. Peace is always possible and there is no need to be tied to the chains of death. Amen.