

EASTER 2024

One of the things Saint Luke did when he wrote the Acts of the Apostles was to record what Saint Peter said to the Roman Centurion Cornelius. Here are these words,

“In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears Him and acts uprightly is acceptable to Him. You know the word [that] He sent to the Israelites as He proclaimed peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all, what has happened all over Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached, how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him. We are witnesses of all that He did both in the country of the Jews and [in] Jerusalem. They put Him to death by hanging Him on a tree. This man God raised [on] the third day and granted that He be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead (Acts 10:34-41).”

Here Saint Peter reviews all that our Lord did and of what happened to Him, of How our Lord went about doing good, of how the Father was with Him and of how the Holy Spirit anointed Him, and then of how He was put to death and finally of how He was raised on the third day and was seen by those whom God had chosen in advance.

Saint Peter then goes on to make one more point, and I would like to concentrate on this point because it pertains in a special way to all of us here today who are celebrating Easter. This is what Saint Peter said,

“[Jesus] commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To Him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins through His name (Acts 10:42-43).”

Jesus Christ is the God-man. He is Lord of all. At His baptism, He was anointed with the Holy Spirit who descended upon Him in the form of a dove. At that same time, the Father spoke and declared, **“This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.”**

From that point on, our Lord went about doing good, healing the sick, driving out demons, and proclaiming the good news of salvation. However, evil men whose hearts were dark and who had no love for the truth conspired to kill Him and to put an end to His teaching. So, they hung Him on a tree ... They nailed Him to a cross, and there He died.

But, on the third day, He rose glorious and triumphant, triumphant over sin and over Satan and over death. During the next 40 days, He appeared to many. He appeared to Mary Magdalene. He appeared to the eleven remaining Apostles and to the men on the road to Emmaus and to many others. Saint John the beloved disciple also saw Him, and years later Saint John wrote these words, **“We have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth (Jn 1:14).”**

In fact, Jesus was not only seen by many, but they also heard Him speak and some even touched Him. For example, there is Mary Magdalene to whom Jesus said, **“Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God (Jn 20:17).”**

There is also Saint Thomas who had said, **“Unless I see the nail marks in His hands, and put my finger where the nails have been, and put my hand into His side, I will never believe (Jn 20:25).”** The next Sunday Jesus appeared again and invited Saint Thomas to put his finger into the wounds in His hands and his hand into His side, Saint Thomas simply said, **“My Lord and my God (Jn 20:28).”**

So, there was no question that Jesus had risen from the grave. This great miracle served to confirm all that Jesus had said and done. It served to confirm all of His teachings and all of His commands and admonitions.

Our Lord’s resurrection served to confirm all that He had taught about heaven and hell and salvation and redemption. Jesus came so that everyone who believes in Him, man or woman, slave or free, Jew or Gentile, everyone, would have forgiveness of sins through His name, and, and, on the last day would be raised up to dwell with God in heaven forever.

[Pause]

So what’s the catch? ... There is no catch! As Saint Peter said, **“Everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:42-43).”**

That, my friends, is the good news that we Catholic Christians believe with all our hearts and know by faith to be true.

The Apostles believed this as well, and because what Jesus taught them was so good and so beautiful and so liberating and because it brought peace to their hearts, they could hardly wait to tell others this good news, this great news.

So the Apostles went throughout the world proclaiming to anyone who would listen that Jesus had come to save us from our sins, and that He had prepared a place for all those who believed in Him and who kept His commandments, and this is where we come into the picture.

As Saint Peter said to the Roman Centurion Cornelius, **“[Jesus] commissioned us to preach to the people and testify that he is the one appointed by God as judge of the living and the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:42-43).”**

This means it is our job right here and now in this time, to preach to the people and to testify that our Lord Jesus Christ is judge of the living and the dead. It is our job right here and now in this time, to preach to the people that everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of their sins. That is what we must do with this good news whose truth was confirmed by our blessed Lord’s resurrection from the dead on that first Easter morning.

Let me conclude then with two observations. First, we practicing Catholics are a small minority of the population today, around 3% or so, and by practicing Catholics I mean those who at the very least go to Mass every Sunday. To put it another way, only about 3 out of 100 people in our area do this. That means 97 out of 100 do not.

It's also the case that most of the folks who make up that 97% either shape the culture or go along with it. They have their own lives, their own music, their own customs, their own morality, their own view of history, and their own view of religion. Furthermore, their views are not shaped by the teachings of Jesus Christ, and the reason they are not is because most of them do not know Jesus. Their world view and the culture they have created is simply pagan.

Furthermore, since they do not see things from a Christian perspective, when faced with problems or questions, they don't ask, "What would Jesus have me do?" Rather, the more thoughtful among them might ask, "What would be the most useful or pragmatic thing to do?" The rest however, just ask, "What's good for me?"

This way of thinking is not only self-centered and pagan but it does not bring about peace of heart. It does not free one from the guilt of sins past or present. Nor does it give hope or meaning in life. Consequently, many today have adopted the philosophy of the ancient pagans, which was "Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die."

It is to these people we must reach out. It is to these people we must testify Jesus is Lord. We have good news for them. We have the answers to the deepest questions life presents to us and to all mankind. We can help those who are not at peace to find peace of heart.

Yes, it's true that many are interested. In fact, lots of today's modern pagans, were once Christians. Sadly, they are now too immersed in their sins, too captivated by the devil or simply not ready to leave behind the works of the flesh for the fruits of the spirit (Gal 5:19-23).

However, many today have never heard the truth about Jesus Christ and what He has taught. We must tell them. In fact we have been commissioned to tell them. To put it another way, if we do not tell them, how will they come to learn about Jesus? So, pray to the Holy Spirit that He lead you to those who need to hear about Jesus.

Here is my second observation. The pagan culture surrounds us today and will consume and absorb anyone who does not vigorously resist it. In fact, if you don't at least get to Mass each week, you will not survive and your faith in Christ will gradually die out. Furthermore, your children who have been taught by you to live as pagans will not keep the faith, and your grandchildren will be raised as pagans with no faith in Christ at all.

In conclusion, to all of you. Be clear about who you are. You are sons and daughters of the most high God. You are His precious children, deeply loved by Him. So rejoice in the Lord always. Thank God for your Catholic faith and for the forgiveness and salvation offered to those who believe in the name of Jesus Christ. At the same time, guard your soul and the souls of your family, and live always in the light of the Resurrection. Amen.