

EASTER 2025 - C

There was a Roman soldier, a centurion, who was stationed in the City of Caesarea Maritime. This man's name was Cornelius. The Acts of the Apostles describes him as "devout and God-fearing" and someone who was "respected by the whole Jewish nation." It also says that Cornelius gave alms generously and that he prayed to God constantly.

One day, in answer to his prayers, God sent an angel to Cornelius who said to him, "Your prayers and almsgiving have ascended as a memorial offering before God. Now send some men to Joppa and summon one Simon who is called Peter ..." This Cornelius did. Then he gathered together his relatives and close friends, and all of them waited for Saint Peter to arrive.

As all this was going on, Saint Peter also had a vision. In his vision, he was made to understand that no one should be called "profane or unclean." It was revealed to Saint Peter that in fact, "God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears Him and acts uprightly is acceptable to Him."

Now this was a totally new idea for Saint Peter, and for every Jew in fact. That's because they had all been taught to kept apart from Gentiles, that is, non-Jews, but this new revelation meant that not only Jews, but also Gentiles would be called to faith in Jesus Christ.

As Saint Peter set out for the home of Cornelius, keep in mind that he as yet was uncertain as to why Cornelius had summoned him. So, when he arrived, he asked Cornelius what was the reason. Cornelius then told Saint Peter about the appearance of the angel. Then he said, "Now, we are all here in the presence of God to listen to all that you have been commanded by the Lord." It is here that our reading from the Acts of the Apostles begins.

Saint Peter began by telling all those present what had taken place concerning Jesus. Of how our Lord had gone about doing good and healing those oppressed by the devil. Of how Jesus was put to death and of how He was raised from the dead on the third day and was seen by many witnesses. Of how Jesus commissioned the Apostles to preach to the people and tell them that He was the anointed one who would judge both the living and the dead.

Finally, Saint Peter concluded by saying this: "To Him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in Him will receive forgiveness of sins through His name." As Saint Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those present, and they all began speaking in tongues and glorifying God. Saint Peter could see that all those present believed and so he ordered that they all be baptized.

At this point, we fast forward to the Jewish Christians in Judea. When they first heard of all this, they could not understand why Saint Peter would have baptized non-Jews. However, once they were told of Saint Peter's vision, they too glorified God and said, "God has then granted life-giving repentance to the Gentiles too."

Now this is a wonderful and very interesting story, but what does it have to do with us today? What does all this have to do with Easter? The answer is everything.

It is our shared faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ which has brought us together today. It is our shared faith in the testimony of the Apostles who declared they had seen the Lord that has brought us together. It is our shared faith in what the Evangelists recorded concerning what took place on the third day, of how Jesus who had died was now alive again, it is that shared faith which has brought us here today.

Furthermore, we not only share this faith with each other, but we also share it with Cornelius and his relatives and friends. They who were the very first Gentile converts, the very first non-Jews to believe in Christ, and we share this faith Saint Peter and the other Apostles, and with all those who were the Lord's first disciples.

Our belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, our faith that He is in fact the very Son of God and God Himself was ratified and proved by our Lord's resurrection from the dead on the third day. Clearly He had died. No one could have survived the brutal torture and the terrible form of execution He underwent.

Yet, now He was alive again, and this was no false testimony cooked up by His followers. He was in fact seen by many witnesses, and not just the Apostles but many others as well, and they included even the Temple guards whom the chief priests had ordered to guard the tomb (Mt 28:11-15).

Our Lord's resurrection was the miracle that served as proof that all His teachings were true and that He was in fact the very Son of God and the Savior of the world. In fact, His life and death and resurrection are central to all human history, so much so, that to this day, we divide and date all time from that which is before His birth and that which comes after.

Now at the very least, all of this requires from us careful consideration, and what do we see? First of all, we see the great love Jesus has for us. At the will of His Father, He gave His life so that we might be healed from our sins and restored to grace. Jesus made it possible for us to be saved and enter into eternal life, and this life He offers to all, Jews and Gentiles alike.

This is the good news that we all have heard and hold dear in our hearts. This is the good news which gives new meaning to life. This is the good news which gives purpose to our earthly existence. It explains why we are here and why we were created. We were made by God and for God. It is His desire that we live in peace and happiness with Him forever.

It is these saving teachings of Jesus that we call to mind each Easter. These teachings that have been passed on by those witnesses to the Resurrection from one generation to the next up to this present day.

What they heard from Jesus, what He taught them has been faithfully preserved by the Church which He founded upon Simon Peter. These are the very things Saint Peter spoke about with Cornelius and his friends. What we understand today about what we must do and believe to inherit eternal life, what has been practiced and lived out by all those who have gone before us in faith goes back from generation to generation all the way to Jesus Himself.

So, in one sense, there is nothing new here. There is nothing new this Easter, and yet each Easter is always new. That's because each Easter celebrates our new life in Christ. Every Easter celebrates not only Christ's resurrection but also that new life in Christ we all received at our baptism, that new life which is sustained and nourished in the Holy Eucharist.

Today, we have before us our victorious king who has triumphed over sin and Satan and death. Christ's victory has in turn freed us from eternal damnation. His conquest has made it possible for all those who believe in Him to become sons and daughters of the most high God.

Besides our shared faith, inspired by Christ's Resurrection, we also have a shared hope. That is why Christ's resurrection inspires in us a confidence that everything Jesus taught is true. He promised that He would prepare a place for us so that where He has gone, we may someday go as well. He gave His Apostles authority to forgive sins and said whose sins you forgive are forgiven them. He promised that bread and wine do indeed become His Body and Blood at the consecration at the Holy Mass.

Finally, and most importantly, besides our shared faith and hope, we have a shared love, a love for God and a love for one another. This twofold love is what has brought us here today. It is our response to God who loves us more than we could ever imagine.

In his Holy Gospel, Saint John reminds us that God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him. He reminds us that God so loved the world, in spite of our flaws and our sins and our weaknesses, that He would sacrifice His Son to save us. Our Lord's suffering and death on the Cross is proof beyond any doubt of this love God has for us. In fact, only the most ungrateful, harden hearts can remain unmoved and indifferent to this love.

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned, humanity had been adrift. We were unable to possess the one thing for which we had been made, namely God, but Jesus reconnected us with the Father. In point of fact, Jesus came to restore love. He came to reestablish a connection between God and man. To reunite us to the one who is love itself.

He made it possible for us to be one again with God. He restored love in the world, and that is why we can say that Jesus brings us together. We are one in our faith in Christ Jesus, and that is why we celebrate Easter. Christ's resurrection reconnected us with God and gives meaning to our lives.

Now let me make one last point. Love is not true love unless it goes beyond oneself to another, and that is exactly what Jesus did. He reached out to us and reconnected us to the Father and to all that is good, but Christ's love should also spill out through us to others.

So then, as we celebrate Easter once again, as we come together in our shared faith in the Resurrection, as we reconnect with family and friends, let us also remember to share what brings us together with those who have yet to hear the good news. Just like Cornelius, today many are seeking God's love. So, just as Saint Peter did, let us bring this good news of our Lord's Resurrection to them as well. Amen.