

Rising to New Life! - Easter

Easter, the Feast of the Resurrection, is coming this year on April 4, 2010 in both the Western and Eastern Christian traditions. It is infrequent that this happens because “Historically, western churches used the Gregorian Calendar [<http://genealogy.about.com/library/glossary/bldef-gregorian.htm>] to calculate the date of Easter and Eastern Orthodox churches used the Julian Calendar. [<http://genealogy.about.com/library/glossary/bldef-julian.htm>] This was partly why the dates were seldom the same.” [<http://christianity.about.com/od/faqhelpdesk/qt/whyeasterchange.htm>] “The Feast of the Resurrection of Christ is the greatest and oldest feast of the Christian Church. Its importance is emphasized liturgically by the long preparation of Lent and Passion-tide, by the special ceremonies of Holy Week, and by the following Paschal-tide (till the Saturday before Trinity Sunday), characterized both in East and West by the frequent reiteration of Alleluia at the Mass and in the Divine Office, as the expression of Easter joy.” [The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, London Oxford University Press, NY and Toronto, pg. 432] Accordingly, worship services on Easter Sunday are often the best attended.

As with several other Christian holidays there are secular traditions as well. “Throughout the English-speaking world, many Easter traditions are similar with only minor differences. For example, Saturday is traditionally spent decorating Easter eggs [[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_eggs_\(decorative\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_eggs_(decorative))] and hunting for them with children on Sunday morning, by which time they have been mysteriously hidden all over the house and garden. Other traditions involve parents telling their children those eggs and other treats such as chocolate eggs or rabbits and marshmallow chicks (Peeps) come from the Easter Bunny in an Easter basket which children find waiting for them when they awaken. Many families observe the religious aspects of Easter by attending Sunday Mass or services in the morning and then participating in a feast or party in the afternoon.” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter#Religious_and_secular_Easter_traditions]

Not only do secular myths and practices dilute the Feast of Resurrection, like other Christian holidays, but it can also be weakened by a misinterpretation of this illustrious Feast. The popular misconception of this primary announcement is resuscitation, coming back from the dead, rather than resurrection, being raised to a new life. This is a very important distinction if we are to get the full and complete picture of this far-reaching declaration in our personal lives. Easter is more than just a day in the life of Jesus or for an occasion in our lives after we have physically died. Easter is an experience that we can have multiple times throughout all the days of our life on this earth.

Resurrection versus Resuscitation:

The earliest Christian writings are from the Apostle Paul. In his letter to the Corinthians he probably describes what we know about the resurrection of Jesus. Paul’s first letter to Corinth was written during his time in Ephesus, which is usually dated as being in the range of 53 to 57 CE. As you can see, his writings were written, unlike the Gospels that are usually dated after 70 CE, very soon after the time of Jesus’ death. While Paul, formerly known as Saul, never met Jesus in the flesh, he tells us what has been passed from the disciples who knew Jesus personally: *“For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve.”* [1 Corinthians 15:3-5] The chapter concludes with an account of the nature of that resurrection: “At the Last Judgment the dead will be raised and both the living and the dead transformed into “spiritual bodies”. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1_Corinthians_15]

“Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” [1 Corinthians 15:51-53] Our earthly bodies are said to be “corruptible” and we are to be clothed with “incorruptible” bodies at the resurrection according to Paul, which is something very different from bodily resuscitation.

If we go back a few verses in Chapter 15 you may see why I think this is an important point: *“But someone may ask, How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come? How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor. So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.”* [1 Corinthians 15:35-44] When some Christians ask if we believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus they often imply a “physical body”, but this is not what the Apostles understood if we comprehend the Apostle Paul’s point of view.

The Apostle Paul further says that he is sharing a mystery, one that is still not very transparent in our scientific understanding of the Universe today. Paul tells us, as he understands it, that our flesh and blood cannot inherit this Realm of God. “I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.” [1 Corinthians 15:50-53] St. Paul seems to explain that neither Jesus nor we are to be raised or experience the resurrection in our physical bodies.

Dr. Wayne Dyer, in his book, *“The Power of Intention”*, has a wonderful explanation in Chapter One about intentional presence. He says that we are really spiritual beings learning how to be human and not the other way around. *This intentional presence is a field of energy, an invisible domain or higher reality that flows throughout the universe and is always available to us. “In the moment of conception, when an infinitely tiny drop of human protoplasm combines with an egg, life in physical form begins, and intention directs the growth process.”* This life is not a creation of new life but a natural continuation of life through an intentional presence. This tiny drop contains all that we are and all that we are to become. *“This field of intent can’t be described with words, for the words emanate from the field, just as do the questions.” “It grows my fingernails, it beats my heart, it digests my food, it writes my books, and it does this for everyone and everything in the universe.”* [“The Power of Intention” by Wayne W. Dyer, Publisher: Hay House, December 15, 2005]

Just as we are learning that all life comes from that which was brought forth from the beginning of time and space, we are beginning to see the relativity of everything that exists. This intentional relationship helps us to see the majesty of resurrection from beginning to end. All of life is constantly renewed and transformed as matter can neither be created nor destroyed. With some of this mystery revealed in our being born into this world through the intention of conception, so may we also sense a

cohesive clue as to our being raised into a continuing life when this life appears to end in some kind of transformation.

Resurrection is not primarily or only for the end of our lives:

Noting that synonyms for resurrection are: rebirth, renaissance, renewal, and revitalization we see they are more about a transformation, change, makeover, or conversion. These are all words that suggest the kind of lives we are to live daily as followers of Jesus the Christ. In other letters the Apostle Paul says that our model in this world is by being transformed by the renewing of our minds. [Romans 12:1-3] He further asserts that the spirit of the Christ is transforming us into his likeness with ever-increasing glory. [2 Corinthians 3:17-18] Many scriptures teach us to *“change our ways and our actions and deal with each other justly...”* [Jeremiah 7:4-6] *“I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”* [Matthew 18:3] Perhaps the most famous portion of scripture is in John’s Gospel chapter 3. Here Jesus speaks to Nicodemus stressing the need for being born again or being born from the Spirit. The message of Scripture consistently reminds us of our need to be made over by transformation and change. We are challenged to continually grow in grace and in the knowledge and love of God. We should also note that the “kingdom of heaven” that Jesus speaks of is not just in the future. These words of Jesus help explain the fullness of the Realm or Kingdom of God, “But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. [Luke 11:20]

“Nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you.” [Luke 17:21]

The Good News:

Many people today need a new start! So where do we start? Why not start with you? You should realize that nothing can be changed or will change in your life unless you desire change and allow and help it to happen. There are plenty of opportunities, like Lent or even every day, during the course of every year to make appropriate and necessary changes in our lives. The important thing is to engage and take charge of whom and what we are, after all, isn’t that what maturity is all about? Another important point, *“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”* [Romans 12:2] A book by Gerald Jampolsky, M.D., titled, “Change Your Mind, Change Your Life”, along with many other books and venues available today make this point very clear. Lent can be a great opportunity to enable you to use a long-standing tradition to help you focus on renewing and transforming your mind and your way of living.

In the Westminster Shorter Catechism the first question brings us to another good point; *“Q. 1. What is the chief end of man? A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”* [<http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC.html>] I believe that all religious groups express, in one way or another, the importance of asking, “What is each person’s chief end or purpose”. Obviously we do not all have the same role as individuals or our world would be dearth of the variety of vocation and aptitude that generate the many benefits necessary for a good life. I have met too many people who have a “job” that is not satisfying and not very fitting to them. It is just a job because it does not fit them regarding their true identity or purpose. Our understanding of human beings today cites these as one of the main causes of despair and burnout.

The Really Good News:

We can experience resurrection without knowing or understanding everything! Truthfulness is not always accuracy but also honesty. When one is on a witness stand in court we are asked if we will be telling “the truth and nothing but the truth”. Our witness may not be exact but it must be honest; the facts as best we know them. To experience resurrection in our lives we must be honest with ourselves and diligently seek necessary change. In doing so as often as necessary we grow in character and become more mature. The scriptures remind us of this healthy process, *“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.”* [1 Corinthians 13:11-13]

Easter, the Feast of the Resurrection, liturgically reminds us of this wonderful opportunity to seek and be changed as often as may be necessary to continue to grow in the excellence of all that we are meant to be. Now we can see why the Feast of the Resurrection is the primary and greatest proclamation and experience the church has to offer. In the name of God, as it has been revealed so uniquely in Jesus the Christ, we can claim and actuate this powerful and life-changing opportunity in an intentional way as part of the wonder of interstellar space. Easter liturgically reminds us that we have many opportunities to rise to a new way of life, experience resurrection, as we move forward in living this life and forever more. Amen.

May the caring peace of God that goes beyond human comprehension, declare God’s love for you in your heart and mind as we see it in Jesus Christ; and may the blessing of God, loving Creator, gracious Liberator, and life giving Spirit keep you steadfast now and always. Amen.