

Easter

Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, true God and true man, has been raised from the dead!

Alleluia!! Christians hear these words and make this happy acclamation every year. But I wonder how long we pause to ponder in what manner Jesus was raised. If he was raised like his friend Lazarus, but doomed to die again ... who cares? A curiosity perhaps, but surely of no abiding interest to us. If he was raised ghost-like, bearing an ephemeral and evanescent body, again ... who cares? Ghosts scare, but they are no big deal and in no manner are they human.

Thankfully, neither of these interpretations apply. Christians proclaim that Jesus has been raised as fully human and yet also as the first born of a new creation of humans. His resurrection has begun to bring about the divinization of mankind and the transformation of the cosmos. Since Jesus has been perfected in his human nature, he will never die again; therefore, for us to behold the risen Christ is to see forward to our communal and personal destiny. The risen Jesus is the first fully divinized human being. As such he is for us the icon of the Trinity, whose nature he shares, while also being a model for all humanity, whose nature he likewise shares with each one of us. He therefore is the bridge between the divine and the human.

Yet we all still die. We are all still for the most part unhappy and at best morally compromised. How then can we come to this sharing of the divine nature, to be truly one with Christ and with his Father? Though union with God is his gift to us, our reception thereof requires of us a death – our own. Everything we think we are needs to be poured out that God may fill us with his Spirit. The first step here, the pouring out, is our responsibility, our sacrifice, for it is our attachment to self that prevents this transformative self-emptying from occurring.

My brothers and sisters, currently we are all akin to water bugs skittering about on the surface of a vast pond of unknown depths. Into these depths of Self we venture not, but rather content ourselves with the surface appearance of things only. We are by choice therefore flatlanders and as a result we are each scattered, disintegrated beings, broken into a million disparate pieces, often to our ignorance. These many pieces are who we think we are. In fact, we tend to fiercely identify with the ever-changing images that they coalesce to form in our minds. It is to these many images, to these many identities, that we must cease to cling, for only by so doing can we have room to receive the Gift of our true Self ... a Self kept safe for us in Christ.

Such a letting go requires discipline, a discipline that is the fruit of our submission to the virtue of religion. The very word religion implies a binding, an oath taking. At our baptism, we covenant with the Lord that we are willing to do what it takes to die to our self-created, illusory, images. This process of disillusionment is the essence of religious discipline and it is very difficult, but this is what we have promised to undertake.

For his part, and of ultimate consequence, Jesus promises to fill us with and change us into himself. In fact, our Lord has already deposited into our souls the pledge of this promise – the Holy Spirit. To die to self, our promise requires of us the practice of several ancillary disciplines: weekly worship, continuous study (especially of the Scriptures and of the teachings of the Church), prayer of an ever-deepening nature, self-mastery in virtue and self-giving in charity.

Such disciplines seek to empty us of all that which currently blocks us from the divine and keeps God's love at arm's length. Unfortunately for most of us, each Easter finds us still far from the goal of our religion. For this reason, each year, we are encouraged to renew our baptismal promises and our dedication to the death of the old self still very much alive within us. Following

this covenantal renewal, we once again turn to the sharing of Christ's very Body and Blood in the Holy Eucharist. It is this continuing gift of the Lord which provides us with the only means by which we can ever hope to fulfill the promises we make to him.