

#### 4.21.2019 Easter Day (Colossians 3:1-4)

There was once a Middle Eastern sheik who grew old and temperamental. One day, on an angry whim, he condemned his longtime personal servant to death. The man was led to the execution platform, bound to the post, and the hatchet was raised. The sheik asked his onetime friend if he had anything to say. The man quickly replied, "If you will spare my life for one year, I will teach your white stallion to talk. If at the end of that year I fail, you may boil me in oil." The sheik considered the offer. He loved his white stallion above all his other possessions, even more than wives, family, or friends. So he said, "I have always wanted to talk to that horse. You seem sincere. I can't see what I have to lose." So he granted the man his request. As the man walked away, a friend came up to him and said, "Are you crazy? Being boiled in oil is much worse than beheading. Do you realize what you've done?" The condemned man replied, "Let's think about this for a moment. A year is a long time. The sheik once loved me, he may love me again. War may come and the sheik will forget about me. In a year the sheik may die. I may die. The horse may die. And who knows? The horse may learn to talk."

Death is the great enemy that we humans live our entire lives trying to avoid. We try to prevent death by eating right, exercising, and going to the doctor for a regular checkup. We try to escape death by wearing helmets, buckling up, and changing the batteries in our smoke detectors. The rich and famous these days even try to beat death by having the blood of young, healthy people transfused into their bodies, by uploading their minds and memories to computers, or by freezing their corpse in the hope that one day science will discover a cure for what the Bible describes as the inevitable reality that *"it is appointed for man to die once, and after that judgment"* (Hebrews 9:27). In those words from the book of Hebrews we discover that those who spend their time and resources trying to defeat our greatest enemy through science may as well place their hope in teaching a horse to talk.

We have a difficult time coming to terms with the fact that physical death is coming for all of us. You may remember how Woody Allen expressed that truth by saying, "Life is full of misery, loneliness, and suffering - and it's all over much too soon." Much too soon indeed, and when we consider the inspired words from the Epistle for this Easter Day, what we discover is that for the Christian, in a very real sense it is already over, we have already died. St. Paul writes, *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory"* (Colossians 3:1-4). You are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.

If you asked most Christians what we celebrate today, I don't think they'd tell you that Easter is a celebration of our death. I believe the most common answer would be one which presented the historical, absolute, and irrefutable truth of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross, and the blessed assurance of everlasting life that we have through our Lord's precious death and glorious Resurrection. When asked about the significance of Easter, the Christian would surely testify to the fact that through our

Lord's sacrifice the world has been reconciled to God, that the Son of God has made a way for every person to have intimate fellowship with the Father, and that the reason Salvation is given so freely to everyone who calls on His name is because it cost God so much.

The hope of life everlasting in union with God in His heavenly kingdom is the cause for our Easter celebration and the truth of the Gospel, but as we reflect on the inspired words of St. Paul we recognize that the message of Easter is not only meant to be the great beacon of hope for a day in the future in which we must confront our own physical death or the loss of one we love. Instead, for the Christian, for those who are dead and whose life is hid with Christ in God, the message of Easter is that everlasting life has already begun, for the old life, the life we once lived has been crucified, and with our Lord we have risen to a new and glorious life hid with Christ in God.

Throughout Holy Scripture we find a great number of passages, which just like our Epistle, speak of the intimate union between our Lord and His people in His death and Resurrection. In a letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes that "*our old self was crucified with Him (Christ) ...*" (Romans 6:6), to the Galatians he proclaims, "*I am crucified with Christ...*" (Galatians 2:20), and to Timothy he declares the truth that, "*If we have died with Him (Christ), we will also live with Him*" (2 Timothy 2:11). Now I know to many modern ears St. Paul's words may sound like analogies. Some who hear his words may be led to think that he is simply painting a mental picture of our old self, in some symbolic way, being crucified so that we may rise to a new and better life. I warn you not to fall for such deception, for these words are not merely analogies or symbols. They are an accurate and literal description of the spiritual truth that through baptism we were united to our Savior in His death and Resurrection. We were crucified with Him to the end that we may rise with Him, and be joined to Him, in His resurrected life.

The new, everlasting life to which we rise, we rise to today, for the stone is rolled away, the veil is torn, the gates of larger life are open wide, and this life that our Lord offers with every new morning is not only a gift *from* God, it is the gift *of* God. When St. Paul wrote, "*I am crucified with Christ...*" He went on to say, "*nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*" (Galatians 2:20). Eternal life, the gift that God gives you today, is the gift *of* Himself, the gift of Christ living in you and I and all who belong to Him, all who have been crucified with Him, and so we see that the Christian life depends entirely on the resurrected life of Jesus, for it is not so much we who live, but Christ who lives in us.

He lives in us. Our selves, our souls and bodies are united to our Risen Lord who sits at the right hand of God. As we reflect on this miraculous truth, the reality of our union with the Resurrected Son of God, we are reminded once again that eternal life is ours today. While our feet may yet walk many difficult paths this side of heaven, by the grace of God through faith our life remains secure, hid in heavenly places with Christ in God, and the evidence of that fact is seen in the way we walk with our Lord in His resurrected life. The proof that we have been crucified with Him, and have risen with Him to God's right hand, is found in our resemblance to Him.

The Christian who most resembles Christ is not the one who sees eternal life as a gift waiting for them on the day of their physical death. The Christian who most resembles Christ is the one who is risen with Him today, who understands that eternal life has already begun, who is united to our Lord in heaven while they live as a member of His Body here on this earth.

The words of our Lord make everything that has been discussed this morning perfectly clear, so in conclusion, consider the words that Jesus spoke to Martha when He met her near the tomb of her brother Lazarus. Jesus said, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die."* Then our Lord asked Martha, *"Do you believe this?"* (John 11:25-26). God has given you this Easter Day, and every new day, to the end that you may live and believe and never die. God wants you to live this natural life in union with Him by faith in Christ. God wants you to believe that He sent His One and Only Son to conquer death, the great enemy that we live our entire lives trying to avoid, and the way that our Savior defeated death, by His own death, so painfully and perfectly reveals God's infinite, sacrificial love for you, and God wants you to rest in the blessed assurance that you will never die, because Easter is the historical, absolute, and irrefutable evidence that eternal life has already begun. *Do you believe this?*