

## HOMILETICS



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**Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion (April 4)**

**Lk 22:14-23:56 (or shorter: 23:1-49): The Passion Narrative.**

### *No Greater Love*

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My dear people. Our reading of the passion of Christ provides us with sufficient food for thought today, and so we shall dispense with the usual sermon lasting for several minutes. But let me have your attention just for two minutes.

Why do we, Christians, give so much importance to the passion of Christ? Some people accuse us of being morbid. They think that we like suffering for its own sake. This, my dear people, is a very big mistake. Our religion is not a religion of suffering. It is a religion of love. The cross means suffering — yes. But we must not stop here. It means suffering which is a proof of great love. The message of the cross is LOVE — God's love for us.

Let the following words of St. John guide our meditations on the passion of Christ:

*"God's love for us was revealed  
when god sent into the world his only Son  
so that we could have life through him...  
He sent his Son to be the sacrifice  
that takes our sins away.  
My dear people,  
since God has loved us so much,  
we too should love one another."*

— I Jn. 4:9-11.

**EASTER (April 11)****Jn 20, 1-9: The empty tomb.****Afternoon masses: Lk 24, 13-35: Christ appears on the road to Emmaus***Enlightened Easter*

“Happy Easter” is the greeting commonly used for today’s feast. But aside from wishing all of you a “Happy Easter”, I should like to see to it that you would have an “enlightened Easter”!

This is most appropriate for today’s feast. Easter is a feast of light. See the Paschal Candle brightly burning. We celebrated the lighting of this candle last night, in a very beautiful and meaningful ceremony. We Christians, by our baptism, are like little candles lit from the big candle which is Christ. Together we shine as the light of the world.

Let me share some of my Easter light with you, so that we can share our joy and broaden our Easter enlightenment. There are two ways of looking at Easter. One way is to look at it with the eye of History; the other way is to look at it with the eye of faith.

Seen with the eye of History, Easter means empty tomb. of Christ and his appearances to his disciples. These are historical facts verified see and examine. Even the enemies of Christ had to admit that they by human senses. The empty tomb was something everybody could not produce the dead body of Christ. Their lame excuse was that it was stolen while the guards slept. St. Augustine rightly scoffs at their excuse by saying: so you depend on sleeping witnesses!

The appearances of Christ were also historical facts. St. Paul, writing to the Corinthians about Christ’s appearances to his disciples, testified that Christ “appeared first to Cephas and secondly to the Twelve. Next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died; then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles; and last of all he appeared to me too.” I Cor. 15, 4-8). In these appearances, as we know from other sources, people could touch him (John 20, 19-31) and

eat with him (Lk 24, 36-43; Jn 21, 9-14). All these matters are objective and fall under history.

But, in spite of the importance of historical facts, the real meaning of Christ's resurrection is beyond history. It is found in the realm of faith. The historical facts of the resurrection are like an unlighted candle. It is faith that gives them light. It is faith that gives them meaning.

The resurrection is the great event that has led the Church to believe that Jesus that built the disciples into the new People of God. It is a power that gives us new life, the life of the spirit. It is the reality that gives us a pledge of our own future resurrection. The resurrection is all this, if we have opened our hearts to the grace given to us by the great love of God.

So today, my dear friends, let us pray for an enlightened Easter. Let us not be like candles without light. Rather, let us rise from our sins and be united with the risen Christ and walk with him in newness of life.

**11 Sunday, Easter season (April 18)**  
**Jn 20:19-31: The doubting Thomas**

### *Unshakable Foundation*

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During the recent earthquakes, several very new buildings were severely damaged; one of or two collapsed. Yet in the same area, old buildings stood their ground, with hardly a crack in their walls. What does this mean? It is an indication that a building can be new, outwardly strong and well built, and yet it can actually have they neglected some basic requirements for a dependable building.

Belief in the resurrection of Christ is the foundation of our christian life. If this belief is weak, then our christian life is also weak: a little crisis can make it crumble. It this belief is strong, then our Christian

life is effective: it remains unshakable in spite of problem; it conquers these problems.

When is belief in the resurrection of Christ weak? When all it means to us is that Christ appeared to his disciples in true bodily form after his death, and that he now lives in heaven, waiting for us to arrive there. All this is true, but such a belief can hardly be the principle of a dynamic that produces real change in human situations and people.

Belief in the resurrection is strong when it is the conviction that Jesus Christ has broken the bonds of sin, that he has defeated the forces of evil, that he has transcended the natural order of drab human life and established a new order, a new creation. We firmly believe in the resurrection when we live as people who are confident that, through Christ, we can be victorious over sin and evil, and hence also victorious over death, which was brought to the world by sin.

The Apostle St. Paul is an example of a man who had a very strong belief in the resurrection. This belief led him to say the following:

*"We are ruled by Christ's love for us, now that we recognize that one man died for all men, which means that all men take part in his death...He died for all men so that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but only for him who died and was raised to life for their sake.*

*"No longer, then, do we judge anyone by human standards. Even if at one time we judged Christ according to human standards, we no longer do so. When anyone is joined to Christ he is a new being: the old is gone, the new has come. All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends, and gave us the task of making others his friends also.*

*"Our message is that God was making friends of all men through Christ. God did not keep an account of their sins against them, and he has given us the message of how he makes them his friends."*

— 2 Corinthians 5:14-19.

Furthermore, Paul said:

*“The truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised. For just as death came by means of a man, in the same way the rising from death comes by means of a man. For just as all men die because of their union to Adam, in the same way all will be raised to life because of their union to Christ... Christ will overcome all spiritual rulers, authorities, and powers, and hand over the Kingdom to God the Father. For Christ must rule until God defeats all enemies and puts them under his feet. The last enemy to be defeated will be death. For the scripture says, ‘God put all things under his feet.’”*

— I Corinthians 15:20-27

It is not unusual to meet people who say: I cannot change myself. I cannot stop committing sin... it is useless to try being good. Such people do not have strong faith in the resurrection. They are like buildings with a weak foundation. When they are shaken by a spiritual crisis they crumble down. I pity them. On one hand they feel bound by the structures of the Christian religion. On the other hand, they do not enjoy the new life which is the real benefit of this religion. It is as if, for them, the resurrection of Christ is not a reality.

In the gospel reading today, we learn that, when the disciples saw the risen Christ, they were filled with joy. So also, if our belief in the resurrection is truly strong, we shall always have joy and peace in spite of the ups and downs of life. Our gospel reading also reminds us that the risen Christ is the one who has the power to forgive sins. If our belief in him is truly strong, we will be able to live without sin.

Let us cease to be doubting Thomases. Let us fall on our knees and say to Christ: “My Lord and my God.” My victory over sin and death! My unshakable foundation!

III Sunday, Easter season (April 25)

Jn 21:1-19 (or 1-14): Appearance of Christ on the shore of Tiberias

### *Basta Ikaw, Lord*

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Some people are fond of calling Jesus Christ "Brother Jess." Other people prefer the third person, masculine, singular pronoun, as when they say, "I'm going to visit Him", meaning the blessed Sacrament. Still others call Jesus "Lord", making this a very informal title as when they say, "basta ikaw, Lord". This practice is alright, as long as the informality does not degenerate into the familiarity that breeds contempt.

But we can ask: what title did the disciples and early Christians commonly use when referring to Jesus? This is not a difficult question. We find the answer in the gospel reading for today. They called him "Lord". For them, this was a very meaningful title. You see, the Jews used it as a substitute for God's proper name. To say that "Jesus is the Lord" is actually to confess that Jesus has the same divine nature as *YAHWEH*, the God who revealed Himself to Moses. To say "Jesus is the Lord" is a profession of faith proclaiming that Jesus is God. It is a statement that saves:

*If your lips confess that Jesus is Lord and if you believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, then you will be saved."*

— Romans, 10:9

*"No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.*

— I Corinthians 12:3

There is a very striking statement in the Acts of the Apostles which says:

*"All the people of Israel, then, are to know for sure that it is this Jesus, whom you nailed to the cross, that God has made Lord and Messiah".*

Peter, in this text, was speaking of the resurrection. He was saying that, through the resurrection, Jesus became the Lord. Does this mean,

then, that Jesus started to have the divine nature only after the resurrection? No! It is a heresy to teach this. The meaning of the text is that Jesus began to exercise his lordship—his divine prerogatives—over men only after his resurrection.

Why didn't Jesus make demands from men as their "Lord" before the resurrection? Well, it would have been unfair to do so. Let me make a comparison. Suppose you want to borrow half a million pesos from a bank. Do you think you can just go to the bank and make the request and expect to get the half million at once? No. The bank will first ask you to prove that, in due time, you will be able to pay back your debt with interest. Similarly, Jesus cannot just ask for our faith. First he has to show that he has all the qualifications to ask for our faith. He must also show that if we give him our faith, he will be able to do a lot of good for us. Now, my dear friends, it was the resurrection that proved Jesus' qualifications to demand our faith. It was the resurrection that demonstrated Jesus' ability to conquer sin and death and give salvation to all men. So, the resurrection was necessary before Jesus could act as men. So, the resurrection was necessary before Jesus could act as Lord and demand our faith, promising us salvation or victory over sin and death. In this sense, the resurrection constituted Jesus as the Lord.

Let us learn at least one lesson today. Let us learn that, when we call Jesus "Lord", we accept his resurrection as the proof of his right to demand our faith and obedience, and the proof that he brings salvation from sin and death. When we call Jesus "Lord", this should mean that we are ready to do anything for him: *basta ikaw*, Lord. This is illustrated in the episode of the gospel reading for today:

*"The disciple whom Jesus Loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken his clothes off) and jumped into the water."*

Peter swam fiercely so that he could immediately put himself at the service of the Lord. By this action Peter practically said, *basta ikaw*, Lord. Let us follow his example.