

79

CHRIST HAS RISEN! CHRIST LIVES!

Easter Sunday
26 March 1978

Acts 10:34a, 37-43

Colossians 3:1-4

John 20:1-9

How I would love, sisters and brothers, not only to have an able tongue for pronouncing words, but a secret grace for really reaching all the hearts listening to me so that I could tell them from the depths of our Christian faith, hope, and joy: Happy Easter! Yes, since last night this is the greeting Christians shout out.

About Easter the Council tells us, «Holy mother church believes that it is for her to celebrate the saving work of her Divine Spouse in a sacred commemoration. . . . Once each week, on the day which she has called the Lord's Day, she keeps the memory of the Lord's resurrection. She also celebrates it once every year, together with his blessed passion, at Easter, the most solemn of all feasts» (SC 102). The church carries in her soul this reality of the resurrection, which she celebrates not only in the solemn feast of Easter but every week when she calls her children to the altar. Every Sunday is a little Easter, just as today is the great Sunday of the year, the great Passover, the resurrection of the Lord.

The etymology of the word Easter [*Pascua* in Spanish] is difficult to trace, but it substantially means the passage of Christ from death to life. He is the only being over whose empty tomb we can preach what Saint Peter has written today: «He went about doing good» (Acts 10:38). But God was with him and therefore raised him up. That is why he is the only person whose tomb can be venerated as an empty tomb. It is an honor to visit the graves of the great figures of history, the tombs where their bodies have turned to dust, but this Son of Man, Christ, has only an empty tomb for us to venerate. How many pilgrims in the Holy Land realize that they are venerating an empty grave! But that, brothers and sisters, is the feast of today.

I want to present you with three ideas from the readings: the first focuses on Christ, who Saint Peter said «was anointed by God with the power of the Holy Spirit» (Acts 10:38); God is with him. The second thought looks at the church as she completes the work of Christ in the world; she has the job of carrying this Good News to all the ends of the earth through all the days of history. And the third thought is to look at ourselves: what is our response and our responsibility if we believe in a Redeemer who died but has now been raised to new life?

Anointed by God with the power of the Holy Spirit, God is with him

As we look at Christ, Saint Peter gives us the finest synthesis in the first reading this morning. Saint Peter is undergoing a conversion. Though a faithful Jew, Peter learns that Christ died not only for the Jews but for all nations. He has a vision of unclean animals whose meat he is ordered to eat, but he responds, «I have never eaten unclean flesh. I am a Jew. I keep the law».

But the voice of the Spirit tells him, «Do not call unclean what God has purified». Since Christ the Son of God has died for all people, there is no distinction among human beings. There is no reason for religious, political, or social divisions. We are all sisters and brothers. We are all called to salvation. The Spirit then tells Peter, «Go, for a Gentile named Cornelius is awaiting you with his family» (Acts 10:19-22). Peter goes and discovers that the Gentile has had the same vision. He must now deal with this family that is not Jewish but pagan, and he delivers the famous discourse that was read this morning.

«Now I understand», says Peter, «that God shows no partiality» and that Jesus has come for everybody (Acts 10:34,36). He then begins to explain the main theme of the preaching of the apostles and the first Christians: that Christ died for all, that Christ is the one anointed by God, and that God was in him saving all people.

These should be our thoughts today, sisters and brothers. As we behold the risen Christ, our faith should overflow with gratitude and delight and hope. We should tell him, «You are the God who became man and who for love of humankind was not afraid to hide your grandeur as God and pass through this world as a man like any other. So little did you distinguish yourself from others that they associated you with criminals, and you died as an outlaw on the cross on Calvary. They buried you in the garbage dump of those who were crucified, but from there, from the garbage dump, from the depths of the abyss, from the descent into the realms of shadow and death, you now rise up as the divine risen One, truly anointed by God with the power of the Holy Spirit» (Acts 10:38).

This is where the incarnation of Christ is crowned. That God-Child whom the Virgin held in her arms, that child she caressed and nursed at her breasts, that man his enemies felt free to beat and despise—he was the flesh of God. God was there. God was embodied in Christ. The glory of the resurrection was necessary so that we humans could come to understand that that dignity of God is found in Christ humiliated and crucified, in Christ who for us is God made a man who understands us, in Christ who felt human exhaustion and sweat and anguish. Now we see it when the glory of God pours forth from his every pore, when his whole appearance and his whole being seem more like the bright sun than some mortal creature. Now we understand what Saint Paul assures us about the resurrection: «What was sown in ignominy is reaped in glory; what was sown in a mortal tomb and seen as death is reaped in glorious and immortal resurrection and will never die again» (1 Cor 15:42-44). Death will have no dominion over him. He is eternal youth, eternal beauty, eternal springtime; he is life without illness or decline but only the fullness of joy and happiness.

You are men and women of our time, feeling anguish and despair at so many problems and seeking paradise here on earth. Do not look for it here; seek it in the risen Christ. Let us unload on him our concerns, our anxieties, our problems, and let us place all our hopes in him. He is everything for humanity; he is the source of happiness. The one anointed by the Spirit of God holds in his human and glorious aspect the answer for all humankind. Let us not doubt it, sisters and brothers. We can say even more justifiably today what Saint Paul told us on Good Friday as we beheld the humiliated Christ: «With confidence let us draw near to the throne of grace, the throne of the Almighty, the throne of happiness and joy» (Heb 4:16). Christ is the fountain that satisfies every kind of thirst for all who draw near to him with faith.

But this Christ who «went about doing good» (Acts 10:38) and in whom God dwelt in all his fullness is not only a moral example for us to follow. What I want to highlight more than

anything this morning, sisters and brothers, is the theological importance of this mystery. This Christ is a sacrament of the Divine. He is «the Way, the Truth, and the Life» (John 14:6). Only those who walk with him will find salvation. That is why he has come: to save.

This salvation we so long for today has a very suggestive name in Latin America: liberation. How easily it can be confused with earthly redemptions! How often the church is misunderstood and seen as communist and subversive, as if it had nothing more to offer than political, economic, or social forms of liberation! It is true that the church is interested in these practical matters because Christ would not be the Redeemer if he had not been concerned about feeding the multitudes who were hungry, if he had not restored sight to the blind, if he had not felt anguish for the crowds of lost sheep who had no one to love them or help them. Human development with its political and social dimensions is of great concern for Christianity. Redemption would not be complete if it did not take into consideration these dimensions of Christ, who chose to be simply a typical person oppressed by a powerful empire, living under a ruling class who savaged his reputation and his honor and left him crucified.

But this is not all that Christ offers us. If he offered only an earthly paradise, then he would have had nothing to offer the good thief on Good Friday afternoon (Luke 23:43). Even as he hung dying, the victim of the system then used for executions, Christ still offered words of liberation. He does not offer utopias or fantasy or sterile consolation. He is truly the King of Glory who offers humankind happiness not only on earth but primarily in heaven. But this, sisters and brothers, doesn't mean being alienated from earthly realities. Rather, infusing a sense of glory and joy into the earth with his resurrection, Christ tells the powerful of earth, the rulers of earth, and also those who suffer on this earth, the oppressed of this earth, that his glorious, heavenly paradise already belongs to this earth. He seeks to present himself as glorious in the history of this world as he will be in eternity. He wants to be present in human history.

This is authentic liberation, sisters and brothers. This is the liberation that is concerned about freeing people from the shameful forms of slavery in which so many people are shackled. But this liberation is not of time and space; it is not confined to this world; it is the complete Christian liberation that Christ offers us in his person. There is no more beautiful example of a free person, of one who is independent of all ties to earthly systems, than this Christ who presents himself before the world as completely autonomous and independent even though he belongs to a class, a category, a world called humanity. That is why Christ knows, sisters and brothers, that his redemption has not ended with this event of the resurrection. There is something even greater.

The church completes Christ's work in the world

My second thought this morning is to turn our gaze again upon this holy church of our Lord Jesus Christ with happiness, gratitude, and faith. Each time I speak about the church, sisters and brothers, I do so with a sense of making reparation, for in these days great harm is being done to the church, which is seen as simply a human institution. Many slanderous accusations are made against her.

Yet in light of the risen Christ the church presents the patient face of Christ, a face still exposed to spit and slaps and defamation. But she knows that she carries hope deep in her heart, and she continues with the great mission of our Lord Jesus Christ that is spoken of in

today's reading, where Christ entrusts to his church the task of announcing his resurrection (Acts 10:42).

Not everyone saw the risen Christ, just as we also have not seen him, and that is why many people laugh at us: «Poor dreamers! They believe in a risen person who never even existed». But Saint Peter tells us today, «To those who, according to God's eternal plan have been chosen to continue the heritage of the Old Testament prophets, to those eyewitnesses he has given the mission of proclaiming the resurrection of the Lord. All those who believe in him will receive forgiveness of sin through his name» (Acts 10:42-43). As Saint Paul says, «He was put to death for our sins and raised to life to justify us» (Rom 4:25). As the prophets announced and the apostles kept proclaiming, Christ's resurrection is evidence of the power of God that marks the break with all slavery so that all who accept this resurrection and this eternal life will be free of their sins.

The church brings this promise of reconciliation to the whole world and preaches this message of hope to all people. That is why one of the church's chief concerns is proclaiming the reality of the resurrection.

Notice that today's three readings are all taken from the New Testament: the first from the Acts of the Apostles, the second from Saint Paul's letter to the Colossians, and the third from the Gospel of Saint John. These apostles reflected with the primitive Christian communities about the reality of Christ's resurrection, and so they were aware of the slanders and the defamations made against the risen One. That is why their preaching was apologetic; that is, they tried to prove that Christ had truly risen and that his resurrection was the apologetic proof of the truth they were preaching. Saint Paul went so far as to say, «If what we are preaching is false, if Christ has not risen, then we are the most miserable of men; we are living with a deluded hope. If Christ died and has not risen, we are preaching a lie» (1 Cor 15:13-19). And we Christians have been deceiving people for centuries.

But there are two facts, sisters and brothers, that could not be refuted by the apostles' own contemporaries, the very ones who witnessed the events of Good Friday: the empty tomb and the undeniable testimony of those who saw the risen One and ate with him. That is what Peter tells us now: «Not everyone has seen him, but we were chosen by God in advance to be witnesses, and we ate and drank with him. He is alive» (Acts 10:41). After all is said and done, sisters and brothers, there are these two facts. First, reliable witnesses say, «We have seen him alive», and second, there is the empty tomb, an obvious spectacle visible to all, even the incredulous and the hostile. If they robbed the body from there, surely the soldiers of Pontius Pilate had the means to find out where it was. They represented authority in Jerusalem; they could search all the houses and lots to find out where the body was. Throughout the centuries no one could deny that the tomb was really empty, nor could they refute the witnesses who brazenly preached in the light of day that they had eaten and drunk with him. No one could say to their faces, «Liars! Deceivers!» Rather, the community continued to grow in this admirable faith which we share even today: the faith of the risen One, the faith that is grounded not only on historical events but on the Word of God who proclaimed and brought to pass the great event of the resurrection.

This is the great mission of the church, announcing this good news that I have the honor of proclaiming this morning: Christ has risen! Christ lives! Fellow Christians, we are followers of a human Redeemer who died but who rose and lives a life that will never end.

Ah! If only we Christians truly lived the joy and hope of this sublime message, there would be no sorrows in the world! Even the most unbearable anxieties and the seemingly insoluble problems would find here the serenity of Holy Saturday, when the tomb of Christ preaches calmness, not pessimism. Jesus said that he was going to rise, and so, filled with hope like Mary, we gathered with expectation last night here in this cathedral and celebrated the beautiful liturgy of the Easter Vigil. As the darkness of night descended, the paschal candle appeared in the doorway of the cathedral: «He is risen!» All the faithful then lighted their candles, and rejoicing in this light of Christ, we became light in the darkness. Joy filled the air, and the paschal candle continues burning until the dawning of the new day which is the church's task.

On this night in history there have been so many intrigues, so many shadows, so many sins, so many crimes that seem to remain hidden, so many people disappeared that nobody seems to know about, and yet the church keeps her little light shining in the darkness. Truth will shine forth! Justice will shine forth! The Lord will return, and all will be given their just deserts! The church's mission is to proclaim this living presence of the risen One.

And not only that, sisters and brothers. The mission of the church is to continue spreading the divine life that Christ brought to the world. Many people during this Holy Week have discovered pardon, peace, and joy! Many people have found opened to them the treasure of redemption! It is there for all who want it. Recently we read these beautiful words of the prophet Isaiah: «You who are thirsty, you who seek to satisfy your thirst with the pleasures of the flesh and the vices of this world, come to this fountain! You who are thirsty, come, and I will give you living water» (Isa 55:1). Here in the heart of his church is Christ offering you redemption, joy, hope, and life!

That is why, sisters and brothers, I want to rejoice this morning with the church of our archdiocese because, if we analyze this Holy Week as the concrete setting in which the resurrection of 1978 is taking place, we find that there are many communities that truly experienced the spirit of this Holy Week, some of them presided over by priests. Here I want to honor and thank my beloved brother priests, not only the pastors who are obliged to minister in their parishes, but also those priests who are not involved in parish ministry but have put aside their ordinary work and gone to communities where there are no priests—villages and towns where, thanks to this generous collaboration, the people had their Holy Week presided over by the church's ministers.

I think also of the many communities that had no priest, but where seminarians, religious women, and lay people—humble *campesinos*, professionals, university students, teachers—assumed the role of leadership. They formed a team and proceeded to preside in the communities. Thanks to the initiative of the pastoral commission, a booklet was published for Holy Week celebrations where there is no priest. With joy and admiration we have seen the marvelous works of the Spirit of God performed by lay people and religious women who exercise the priesthood they have by baptism in the midst of the communities, which were therefore able to experience the Passover of the Lord. Perhaps today they are reflecting with us on the radio as we celebrate this crowning feast of Holy Week.

Nor can I forget the Holy Week of those who made of it an honorable vacation. They have perhaps no other chance to rest, and so in all honesty and with a sense of devotion they have gone to their places of recreation. May God bless you as well.

But we must also remember that for many people this has been a week of disorders and vices and orgies. Who has not listened to the testimony of young people—and not only young people but also adults—who think that the flesh is an idol to be worshiped? Look at how they make Holy Week a time for drunkenness and gluttony, a time for license and all forms of intoxication! My sisters and brothers, I pray that such celebrations of Holy Week find God's pardon. I pray that when these people return from their shameful vacations, they speak not of rest but of distortions of their own personality. I pray that they will discover the mercy of God who desires not the death of sinners but that they repent and live.

Also, for some, Holy Week is a time for silent intrigues and despicable politics. They take advantage of these days to plot new violence and find new ways to offend our sisters and brothers. May God forgive them also and call them to conversion.

As we reflect on the church's mission to preach Christ's redemption, I think also, sisters and brothers, about the workaday Holy Week of those who are humble, anonymous servants, those who perhaps against their conscience but because they need to earn a living had to continue their service. These are the unseen servants of those who perhaps offend God or of those who spent their Holy Week honestly. Who thinks of them? Who thinks of the humble servant, the watchman, the maid, the telegraph operator? Who thinks of all these humble servants? My sisters and brothers, these people are too numerous to mention here, but the Lord will bless the spirit with which they sanctify their vocation and their work as long as they strive to sanctify the Lord.

This, then, is the church that preaches the redemption and the resurrection, the joy we desire for all people. That is why I was telling you, sisters and brothers: I sincerely hope not only that my words are broadcast by the miracle of the radio, but that each word be graced by the Spirit of God so that every heart can hear the call of this Easter day—the call to live with the joy of those who have been redeemed.

Our responsibility to believe in a Redeemer who died but has risen

Therefore my third and final point, sisters and brothers, is what Saint Paul has told us today, «Everyone who is baptized bears the mark of Christ's death and resurrection». Last night here in the cathedral, just as in all the Easter vigils, we lived the reality of our baptism, which is the seal of the passion, death, and resurrection. Together with the risen Christ we heard today the great responsibility we have: «If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, not what is on earth» (Col 3:1).

But let us truly understand these words. Saint Paul is not proposing some dichotomy, as if the things of this earth had no value and we should somehow resign ourselves to waiting for the things of heaven. That is not what Saint Paul means. To understand these words, we have to read the verses before today's reading (Col 2:16-19), for there we discover that Paul is correcting a religious error that had crept in among the Colossians. Some of them believed that there were heavenly forces which dominated them and from which they had to flee for they

signified earthly sin and evil. Thus because of a misunderstanding of these heavenly things, they also separated themselves from the things of this world.

Saint Paul is teaching us here that the resurrection of Christ overcomes these errors.

Such spirits do not exist; there exists only the King of Glory who became man and redeemed humankind. Therefore, we must seek in Christ what is above, that is, the things that he has brought us, the things that Christ by becoming incarnate and living in history has made part of our history, the seeds of heavenly things. Living right now the realities above means living in justice and peace and love; it means human rights and respect for our neighbor. Living the realities above means that we now must live the new life of the risen One on this earth. It does not mean being unconcerned about the things of this world. Rather we must manage the things of earth with the criteria of heavenly justice.

Therefore, sisters and brothers, I want to conclude by reading these precious words of the Council's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: «Undergoing death itself for all of us sinners, Christ taught us by example that we too must shoulder that cross which the world and the flesh inflict upon those who search after peace and justice. Appointed Lord by his resurrection and given plenary power in heaven and on earth, Christ is now at work in the hearts of men through the energy of his Holy Spirit, arousing not only a desire for the age to come, but by that very fact animating, purifying, and strengthening those noble longings too by which the human family makes its life more human and strives to render the whole earth submissive to this goal» (GS 38). In other words, the resurrection is also a message of liberation for the things of the world.

That is why the church cannot be deaf or mute, sisters and brothers, before the entreaty of millions of persons who are oppressed by a thousand slaveries and are crying out for liberation. But the church tells them what the true freedom is that they must seek: it is the freedom that Christ introduced to earth when he rose and burst the chains of sin and death and hell. To be like Christ, free of sin, is to be really free with true liberation. Those who put their faith in the risen One and work for a more just world; those who protest against the injustices of the present system, against the abuses of unjust authorities, against the wrongfulness of humans exploiting humans; those who base all these struggles on the resurrection of the great Liberator—these alone are authentic Christians.

That is why the resurrection must give people courage and integrity. Far from being cowards, Christians must be like Christ in confronting Pontius Pilate and Herod and all the persecutors. With the serenity of lambs led to the slaughter, Christians must await in graves of martyrdom the hour when God will glorify them. That hour is not decided by human beings; it is the hour of God who is the only One who can save us. But waiting on God and trusting in Christ is the secret of true liberation.

Finally, sisters and brothers, I want to announce that immediately after the homily we are going to confer upon one of our seminarians, Rafael Edgardo Urrutia Herrera, the ministry of acolyte. He is in his last year of theological studies, and very soon we will ordain him a priest. It has also been suggested that today when we pause to remember those who have died, we remember in a special way those who died on March 17 both here and in Apopa¹. With our

¹ Reference to the massacre, already denounced in the homily of 19 March 1978, which left eight *campesinos* dead, seven disappeared and forty wounded. See «Solidarity» in *Orientación* (2 April 1978).

contributions, let us help those who were wounded and the family members of those who died; perhaps Holy Week has made us a bit forgetful of these people. I also want to denounce here that during Holy Week a Jesuit was refused entrance into our country.

Despite the difficulties and trials of the church, sisters and brothers, we continue on with the joy of a people who see new seeds of vocations springing forth in our midst. With joy we confer the ministry of acolyte upon our beloved brother Rafael Edgardo Urrutia Herrera, soon to be ordained a priest. Let us now stand as we begin this ceremony.