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Easter Sunday

March 31, 2013 Sunday Readings for Cycle C:

Acts 10:34, 37-43; Ps 118; Col 3:1-4 (or 1 Cor 5:6-8) Jn 20:1-9 (or Lk 24:1-12)

THE RESURRECTION IS FOR US

Lawrence E. Frizzell

The Paschal festival, known in English as Easter, is the most solemn of all the Church's feasts (Vatican II, *Sacred Liturgy* #102). The mystery of God's mercy, manifested in myriad ways throughout creation and history, is focused ultimately on Jesus. With special gratitude the Church commemorates his death as the unique sacrifice that brings humanity back to the heavenly Father. The first generations of Christians recognized a profound continuity from the time of Moses and the Exodus to the work of Jesus. The Israelites were liberated from a political enslavement that tried to stifle conscience. In the passing of Jesus through death to new life, humanity was offered freedom from the even more pervasive servitude to sin and Satan. Although the Passover (*Pascha* in Aramaic) does not exhaust Christian efforts to understand Jesus' death-and-resurrection, its symbols are primary. Thus St. Paul drew the attention of Corinthian Christians to the unleavened bread and lamb of the Jewish feast. A thorough house cleaning and use of unleavened bread pointed to the high moral life demanded of Jews and Christians. The latter rejoiced that "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed!" (1 Cor 5:7).

After participating in the drama of Holy Week, Christians rightly celebrate Easter as the triumph of Jesus over death. The resurrection is the heavenly Father's seal of approval on the work and especially the obedient death of Jesus. The Church wants us to rejoice as well in the way in which Baptism unites *us* with Jesus in his suffering and death, his resurrection and ascension (see Romans 6:3-5). For the full impact of our worship as a vehicle to understand the Paschal Mystery and our Baptism we should celebrate the Easter Vigil. Yet even in the less elaborate Sunday Mass, we use the water blessed in the Vigil and renew our baptismal promises. We are challenged to make our faith active in the fabric of our daily lives. "Since you have been raised up on company with Christ, set your hearts on what pertains to higher realms where Christ is seated at God's right hand" (Col 3:1). Our entire existence is now centered on Jesus. As St. Paul told the Galatians: "The life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal 2:20). Rooted in his death-and-resurrection through Baptism, we look forward to his return as judge (see Acts 10:42). "When Christ our life appears, then you shall appear with him in glory" (Col 3:4).

As we read the Gospel narratives about the risen Lord, we cannot fail to note small discrepancies among the traditions. These are probably indications of oral accounts in different communities of Christians. What is important is the consistent witness to a paradox: this is the same Jesus whom they knew, yet he is now in a totally new situation! The Gospels also note that *women* were the first witnesses to the resurrection. Because the legislation of the Jewish society in which the early Christians lived usually did not allow women to testify as witnesses, the evangelists would have been stupid to fabricate such accounts. Rather, they are describing the transformation of life by the risen Lord. The women's devotion to Jesus gave them courage to

visit the tomb and their piety was rewarded. The Fourth Gospel reports that Peter and the beloved disciple (representing the typical Christian) hastened to the tomb; the latter "saw and believed" (Jn 20:8) yet they soon departed. Mary Magdalene was not so hasty to go home. She had alerted the apostles about the empty tomb, but now she wanted to find the Master's body. She perceived the New Adam and thought him to be a gardener. This is the Good Shepherd who knows his sheep and calls his own by name (Jn 10:3, 14). Mary recognized his voice and addresses him by the familiar title "Rabbouni" (Teacher).

It is the privilege of Christians to know Jesus by many names and titles and to savor a relationship with him that is intensely personal and yet within a community of believers. "O Christ our God, you spoke clearly to the myrrh-bearing women; you bestowed peace on your apostles, and to the fallen you have brought resurrection" (*Liturgy of the Byzantine rite*). Knowing what he has done for us and for all people, we ask to know the mission that we are to accomplish in his Name.