

Text for the Times:

Death and Resurrection

Life in death, victory in defeat, joy and peace in pain and desolation – this is the gospel of Christ, the good news of the crucified and risen Lord. In the first text we have chosen, St Athanasius develops the idée maîtresse of the fourth gospel, and shows us the triumphant glory of Christ's passion. In the second, a disciple of St Bernard's shows us how his resurrection speaks to love, as surely it must, since he died of love. In the third, St Basil reminds us how the death and resurrection of Christ have for the faithful Christian turned death into life.

Now the Lord went forth to the combat in which he was to make plain to all the triumph that he would win over the devil. They clothed him in a scarlet robe, put a crown of thorns on his head and a reed in his hand, and came and knelt before him. What an unheard of, unbelievable miracle, a sure measure of his great victory! They had condemned him as a man, but now one after another they worshipped him as God. They had considered him cheap and worthless, but now they acknowledged him as a king. Not knowing what they did, they had covered him with reproaches, but now against their will they hailed him as a prophet. They had laughed at him and struck him, but now they gave him the fruits of victory – the scarlet robe, the crown woven from thorns, the reed. Little did they know that against their will he was taking as his spoils of battle all the things they were using to mock him.

Then he hurried to the spot where the cross stood waiting for him to mount, in order to snatch away from the enemy 'the bond that stood against us, nailing it to the cross'. There he would 'disarm the principalities and powers and make a public show of them, triumphing over them' on the tree (Col. 2: 14, 15); he would show that man had been 'rescued from the lion's mouth' (2 Tim. 4: 17). Soon with his own blood he would water and cleanse the earth. But first he stripped off his garments. How right and proper it was that he who was to lead man back to Paradise should strip off the garments that Adam had received when he was thrown out of Paradise. When Adam sinned he had to die as well, and so he was given coats of skins made out of dead animals, a token of the death due to him as a penalty of sin (cf. Gen. 3: 21). How fitting it was that the Lord, who for our sakes took upon himself everything that was ours, should also have worn such clothes as these, so

that he might strip them off and clothe us in their stead with life and immortality (cf. 1 Cor. 15: 53).

St Athanasius

My brothers, what does the joy in your own hearts tell you about the love of Christ? If you look closely at yourselves, I think you will find if you ever loved Jesus, loved him living, loved him dead or loved him living again, that today above all, when the news of the resurrection sounds and resounds so frequently throughout the Church, your hearts will rejoice within you and say, 'They have told me the news that Jesus my God is alive'. Now my spirit, that was tired and lukewarm and weak, comes to life once more. For the glad tellings of this good news raises the guilty from the dead. Otherwise they are surely dead and buried for ever if Jesus does not bring them with him on his return from hell. By this you know that your spirit really lives again in Christ, if you are convinced of this: 'It is enough for me that Jesus lives.' What a true sentiment and how worthy of a friend of Jesus; what a pure love it is which can say, 'It is enough for me that Jesus lives'. If he lives, I live, since on him my life depends: indeed he is my life, in him I am well content. What can be wanting to me if Jesus lives? In fact everything is wanting, nothing else matters to me when Jesus lives. When the love of Christ so utterly absorbs a man's heart that he forgets everything except Jesus Christ and cares only for the things of Christ, then it is, I think, that charity is perfected in him. Such a man is not weighed down by poverty; he does not resent injuries; he laughs at reproaches; he scorns all loss; he counts death gain: he does not even think of it as death, because he knows that he has passed from death to life.

*Guerry Igniacensis (twelfth century):
Sermon I on the Lord's Resurrection*

In Old Testament times the deaths of the saints were observed with tears and mourning: Joseph bitterly bewailed the death of Jacob; the Jews beat their breasts with great sorrow at Moses' end; many paid their last respects to Samuel with tears. But today we rejoice in the deaths of the saints. With Christ's death on the cross the nature of grief changed. We no longer accompany the deaths of the saints with funeral laments, but perform sacred dances about their graves, since for the just man death is a sleep, or rather a departure for a better life. Hence the exultation of the martyrs when they are facing their bloody end. The yearning for a happier life kills the pain of death, since the martyr has no eye for the danger, but for his crown; has no fear of blows, but counts up the rewards; does not see the executioners who scourge him here below, but the angels acclaiming him in heaven. He has no

care for present peril, but only for an everlasting prize. The martyrs have already received a glorious pledge of this among us, since they are acclaimed by us all with holy praises, and draw countless crowds to their graves.

St Basil the Great: from a homily on the martyr Barlaam

selected and translated by Dominican students at Hawkesyard Priory

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