

Session Ten: Jesus – Resurrected Lord

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

1 Corinthians 15:3-7



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HOW HAS THE RESURRECTION CHANGED EVERYTHING?

Session Introduction

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the central fact of Christianity, the event that proved the divinity of Christ and that completed God's intention to save humanity. It is a remarkable claim to make: people do not rise from the dead. It is also the truth upon which the Christian faith stands or falls. What would happen if it were proven that Jesus of Nazareth had never lived or had never risen from the dead? Such a discovery would destroy the Christian faith. *"If Christ has not been raised,"* wrote St. Paul to the Corinthians, *"then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain"* (1 Cor 15:14).

This centrality of the resurrection has important consequences concerning the heart of Christian belief. Christianity is not fundamentally a philosophy, though Christians have developed impressive philosophic systems. It is not mainly a code of ethics, though the Christian faith clarifies the moral order and makes serious moral demands on its followers. It is not primarily a practical plan for the betterment of the existing world, though Christians have had much to say about that. At its heart, Christianity is an epic adventure whose hero and primary actor is God. God has entered human history and decisively changed it by dying and rising from the dead. And he enters the life of each one of his followers and decisively changes them too.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 638

"The Resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community, handed on as fundamental by Tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the Paschal mystery along with the cross."

We may perhaps have thought something like this: Yes, the resurrection was a mighty event, and showed Jesus to be God's divine son; but what exactly does that have to do with me? I can admire Jesus and be amazed at the way he was raised from the dead, but how does what happened to him affect my life? This question touches on what it means to become a disciple of Jesus. To follow Jesus means more than listening to his teaching, imitating him, and learning to love him. It means being transformed into Christ himself, so that what happened to him also happens to us. This is the gift we received when we were baptized, and the Holy Spirit came to live within us. Because he lives in us, his death on the cross was our crucifixion, and his

resurrection is our rising from the dead. The amazing truth is that Christians have already died and are now alive again. Because of what Christ has done, our physical death is now a doorway to the completion of what we can already experience. St. Paul spells this out for us, speaking to each one of us individually: *"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory"* (Col 3:1, 3).

As many of the Church Fathers have put it: "God became man that men might become God." What Christ is by nature and from all eternity, we become by adoption as his sons. When St. John tried to express the mysterious destiny awaiting us he put it this way: "Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 460

"The Word became flesh to make us "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4).

"For this is why the Word became man, and the Son of God became the Son of man; so that man, by entering into communion with the Word and thus receiving divine sonship, might become a son of God" (St. Irenaeus).

"For the Son of God became man so that we might become God" (St. Athanasius).

"The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods."
(St. Thomas Aquinas)

I. Opening Prayer

Pray together as a group:

*O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart that I may hear your Word,
and understand and do your will.*

*Do not hide your commandments from me, but open my eyes,
that I may perceive the wonders of your Law.*

Speak to me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom.

*On you I set my hope, O my God,
that you shall enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of your knowledge;
not only to cherish those things which are written, but to do them;
For you are the enlightenment of those who lie in darkness,
and from you comes every good deed and every gift.
Amen.*

II. Reading Scripture

Read aloud as a group the following passages.

After reading each passage, answer the questions together in order to draw out some of the key ideas.

Some main ideas for each passage are listed in the back of this book to help with your discussion if needed.

1. Luke 24:1-8
(The Resurrection)



- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- What do you think Jesus' disciples were feeling or thinking seeing Jesus raised from the dead?



2. John 20:24-29
(The doubt and confession of Thomas)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- This is the famous “doubting Thomas” passage. What does Thomas think about the reports he has heard of the resurrection? What might you have thought in his place?
- What is the physical state of Jesus that is shown here? How is his humanity the same as before, and how is it different?
- Consider the significance of Jesus’s comment: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.” Why are they specially blessed?

3. Romans 6:5-11 (Dying and rising with Christ)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- What does Paul mean when he says that Christians have died with Christ?
Paul speaks of the “former man” here. What is the significance of that phrase?
What might it mean for Christ’s disciples to be dead to sin and alive to God?

4. 2 Peter 1:3-4 (Partakers of the Divine nature)

- Describe in your own words what is happening in this passage.
- This passage hints at the high destiny intended by God for all his children. What does Peter say is the cause of the corruption of the world?
- What might it mean to become “partakers of the divine nature”?

III. Applying Scripture

Based on your reading, discuss the following questions as they apply to your life. Depending on how much time you have available, you may not be able to discuss all of these questions. If necessary, choose one question to discuss in a significant way.

- 1 There is a strong temptation to view our faith as mainly a set of rules to follow without thinking of the real events of Jesus' death and resurrection. "I do these things, I don't do those, I get to Mass, I'm doing my duty, and that's the whole point." The resurrection should remind us that the center of our faith is the person of Jesus and his saving action for us. **How can you live your faith less as a checklist of "do this, don't do that" and more as a living relationship with the Risen Lord? In what ways can you keep the reality of the resurrection more present in your life?**

- 2 The Resurrection has opened the path to new life for all of us. The rupture between us and God has been healed and humanity is restored, opening the way to eternal life with God. On our own, we could not have imagined the way that God accomplished this – the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. Looking back, it can be easier to see the workings of God over time and how they all come together. **Has God resolved difficult situations in your life in ways that you could have never imagined? Can you recognize the times in which God has brought good out of tragedy and pain? Are there any current difficulties in your life that you don't see a solution to and that you need to entrust to God? How can the Resurrection help you trust in God and his promises?**

- 3 Christ's resurrection has given us the ability to become sons of the Living God. The Resurrection is an invitation to live as sons of God the Father, which was God's intention for us from the beginning of creation. By baptism, we become adopted sons of God, "partakers of the divine nature" and co-heirs with Christ. But we have not lost our weakness and inclination to sin. The struggle of the Christian life is one of constant conversion to become more like Christ, avoiding and repenting of sin throughout our lives until we are one with him in heaven. **What areas of your life need further conversion to be more like Christ? Where have you seen the grace of God work in your life to overcome sin? Do you take advantage of the Sacrament of Reconciliation in order to be restored to the life of grace after you sin?**

- 4 The Resurrection gives us a new understanding and expectation with regards to death. Jesus' Resurrection is a promise for our own. There are many people today who avoid any thought of death and dying because of a fear of the unknown or because they believe that after death is just nothingness. Christian faith gives us the hope of heaven and the resurrection. **Do you think about your mortality and life after death? Is this something you approach with hope and confidence or anxiety and fear? How can a deeper understanding of Christ's resurrection change the way you approach life and death?**

IV. Call to Action

Write down for yourself one concrete way that you are going to apply today's Scripture Study to your life.

Example:

Choose one difficulty in your life that you do not see a solution to and entrust it to God's providence.

V. Closing Prayer

Pray together:

*Lord God, let us keep your Scriptures in mind
and meditate on them day and night,
persevering in prayer, always on watch.
We beg you, Lord, to give us real knowledge of what we read,
and to show us not only how to understand it,
but how to put it into practice,
and to obtain spiritual gifts
enlightened by the teaching of the Holy Spirit,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
whose power and glory will endure throughout all ages.
Amen.*

THE EMPTY TOMB

A supplemental note for further study

Given the paramount importance of the Resurrection for Christian belief, so much hangs on its reliability. It is natural to ask the question: what evidence do we have that Jesus rose from the dead? Is this just a legend, something that came to us out of the mists of time and that cannot be grounded in what we know from historical evidence? As it happens, the evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus is surprisingly good. There is enough evidence to suggest that the Resurrection is the best explanation of the facts.

All sensible people will acknowledge these five bits of historical evidence. (1) A man named Jesus son of Joseph lived in Palestine during the early first century. He was noted as a prophet and miracle worker, he gained a large following, ran into opposition, and was put to death through crucifixion by the Romans under the Procurator Pontius Pilate. (2) The records we have of the life and death of Jesus (the Gospels) are eyewitness accounts written soon after the events they describe by people who knew Jesus personally. (3) Soon after the death of Jesus, his disciples began to preach that they had witnessed the Resurrected Christ, and that they had met with him on numerous occasions. None of them ever recanted this claim, and many of them were killed because of it. (4) The tomb where Jesus had been buried was found empty, and no one either then or since has been able to find the body of Jesus. Both the Romans and the Jewish authorities had compelling reasons to try to find the body, since they wanted to end reports of the Resurrection, but they could not find it. (5) The followers of Jesus, not a particularly talented or societally privileged group, set out on foot and began the most influential and far-ranging religious movement in the history of the world.

Whatever one might think of the truth of Christianity, these are historical data that need some kind of explanation. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, we need another way to deal with these known facts.

There have been various attempts through the centuries to explain the facts without resorting to a Resurrection. Some have said that the disciples stole the body themselves, hid it away, and proclaimed that Jesus had risen. But this has two significant difficulties. For one, the disciples were not expecting Jesus to rise from the dead, and by their own accounts were astonished when it happened and could hardly believe it. For another, large groups of people do not usually go lock-step to their deaths for lies that they themselves have concocted. A second theory is that everyone mistook the location of the real grave, and mistook an empty tomb for the place of Jesus's burial. But Romans were excellent administrators and the Jewish authorities were very concerned about this new movement. How likely is it that everyone – the disciples including the women who had come to anoint the body, the Roman army, and the High Priests – would all

make the same mistake and never figure it out? Still others have suggested that Jesus wasn't really dead after he was taken down from the cross, and that in the cool of the tomb he revived, pushed away the stone, appeared to his disciples, and then somehow disappeared. Some have floated the theory that the disciples and the five hundred people who purportedly saw Jesus alive after his death were having mass hallucinations based on wish fulfillment. These are the best theories going, and all of them are far-fetched. The best explanation that covers the facts most completely and most compellingly is that Jesus really did rise from the dead, that he appeared to his disciples, and that he gave them instructions to continue his mission.

Someone might object: "But Jesus *couldn't* have risen from the dead, because that never happens!" But this is not an argument from historical data; it is a philosophical presupposition. Christians know that people do not usually rise from the dead. But they also claim that Jesus was not like any other human; he was also God himself among us. There is nothing strange in the possibility that the divine son of God, the Lord of life, might rise from the dead.

St. Leo the Great: Easter Homily

"The Lord's Resurrection did not do away with His body (as a thing of no account), but forever changed it. His nature was not destroyed but wonderfully altered: His body, which had suffered crucifixion, was freed from the possibility of suffering or pain; though He had been tortured, His flesh was made immortal and incorruptible. The same body which had been subject to every human frailty and weakness, now exists forever in glory. Do not be amazed when St Paul teaches that all of us, baptized into Christ's death, have likewise begun to experience the power of His resurrection. Let us not live under the suspense of uncertainty. Since we have received (in our baptisms) His promise, let us now with the eye of faith see the things which will be for us, rejoicing in the uplifting of our humanity in His."

Additional Readings from Scripture

These optional readings build on the themes discussed in this session. You are encouraged to read and pray with them on your own in between this meeting and the next.

Matthew 16:21 Jesus knew beforehand that his crucifixion was coming, and also that he would be raised from the dead. *"From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised."* His disciples had a very hard time understanding what he meant.

Luke 24:13-27 *"O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.*" In this passage Jesus himself teaches his disciples that his death and resurrection is the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Philippians 3:8-11 St. Paul describes what it means to him to be a disciple: that having given up everything for Christ he now expects the life of Christ to reproduce itself in his own life: *"that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."*

Ephesians 2:4-6 St. Paul here teaches that we were all dead in our sins, and the reason that we can now come back to life is because Jesus first died and then was raised from the dead. The life of Christ is now our life, and we will be with him wherever he goes. *"God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with him, and made us sit with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus."*

1 Peter 1:3-5 St. Peter shows that the resurrection of Christ is the basis of our hope for eternal life, and therefore of our joy: *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."*

Revelation 1:17-18 St. John has a vision of Jesus that strikes fear into him. Jesus calms him, and describes himself as the one who is risen, and who therefore has power over death: *"He laid his right hand upon me, saying, 'Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.'"*