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## HE HAS CONQUERED DEATH

Jesus' rising from the dead marks the triumph of a fully human nature over death. Each of us like Mary's Son is born to earthly life and from that moment we begin a journey that will eventually end in dying. Such a sure destiny would weigh us down as the years advance if we did not know that in and with Christ we die and then share in His resurrection glory.

We experience our own extraordinary union of body and spirit and all that it entails of delight and sometimes misery. The pull of one part of us against the other has been described as warfare. Struggle is part of our makeup. Philosophers have pondered this unlikely connection of the physical and the spiritual and tried to understand why it came about. We who are followers of Jesus Christ have an answer in the mystery of His death and rising from the dead.

St. Augustine says, "This is what defines our faith, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Sermon 229J, #3, New City Press). The cross alone is not enough. When Christ first appeared to His disciples "in their panic and fright they thought they were seeing a ghost." Jesus understands what is passing through their minds. "Why are you disturbed?...Look at My hands and My feet. It is really I. Touch Me" (Lk 24: 37-39). Jesus returns to Jerusalem fully human. He did not enter into some kind of angelic state, ridding Himself of the bodily part of our nature which He had taken on. St. Augustine declares, "He ate and it was He Himself—the same Who had been seen and hanged on the cross." The saint reflects that the apostles were "hard to convince, but their correction (from Jesus) is our instruction" (ibid). The disciples' puzzlement and doubts gave way to amazement and joy as they touched their Risen Savior.

Our bodies subject us to temptation, disease, the failing strength of aging, and the ultimate price of death. But it is in our frail flesh that we receive the sacraments and can partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus. We perceive the wonders of the natural world through our hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching. Thereby we meet and relish beauty everywhere around us.

Some spiritual systems urge us to free ourselves from all that is physical, to aim at a goal where the senses and sense satisfaction are considered worthless. This is not the route followed by Christians who have Jesus, wholly God and also wholly Man, as the Way.

We are invited to celebrate our physical as well as our spiritual dimension and most particularly in our Easter awareness. Paschal consciousness should be with us always. We praise God for making us as we are, for God saw this as very good (Gn 1:31). The joys

we receive through our bodies foretell what will be given our glorified bodies in Heaven. We do not disdain the material part of us, though we do not let it dominate.

Jesus became our Savior through His dying and rising from the dead. We are made for life, the eternal life He purchased for us in His 33 years on our planet. We shrink from our mortality, and understandably so. Life is our vocation, a life of such overflowing abundance that we cannot imagine it here below. Death was not part of the original divine plan. It is a passageway, not an easy one but a sure passageway, to the everlasting life awaiting us.

Do we fear dying? We have no experience of the separation of body and spirit, and the prospect can unnerve us. Jesus entered into our darkness in order to give us comfort when earthly light fades away. The glory of His Rising did not have to proceed through the agony of crucifixion, but He chose this path to be our strengthener in every suffering along our temporal course.

Pope John Paul writes in *Rich in Mercy*, “The Paschal mystery in Christ is the summit of the revelation of the inscrutable mystery of God....In His Resurrection, Christ has revealed the God of merciful love, precisely because He accepted the Cross as the way to the Resurrection.”

St. Paul says to us as he did to the Corinthians, “If our hopes in Christ are limited to this life only, we are to be pitied” ( 1Cor 15:19). Our hope does find Christ here below in what has been called a valley of tears but that hope does much more. It raises us high to look ahead to a celestial realm where a place has been reserved for us for all eternity. In a world so often plunged in gray uncertainty, the light of Easter brilliance penetrates the shadows to lead us to join the chorus of earthly and heavenly Alleluias. Christ is risen!

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