

Easter Vigil 2009

LESSON: Irreversible Victory, Undeniable Credibility

Jesus, the crucified one, has now been raised from the dead. The Lord is Risen! He is TRULY Risen! (did they get it?)

Utter defeat has been transformed into **irreversible victory**. Evil has had its way with God's anointed, the Messiah.

- ✍ It did all it could to **break down** the courage and faithfulness of Jesus, our Savior.
- ✍ It used up all its **weapons** of hate, injustice, humiliation, and pain.
- ✍ It fought an impressive, bloody fight - but God's **Anointed One** came out victorious.

And what does that mean for us? It means **everything**, absolutely everything. The resurrection is the stamp that **validates** everything Jesus did and said:

- ✍ His claim to be God's Son, to have authority to forgive sin and reestablish communion between God and man;
- ✍ His universal call to abandon self-centeredness for love of God and neighbor as the path to true happiness;
- ✍ His promise to give grace through a Church that will endure forever.

If Jesus had **not** been raised, **none** of that would be worth listening to!

- ✍ He would have been just one more **nice guy who finished last**, one more dreamer whose dreams were crushed by the harsh reality of real life.

This is why whenever people start living a life that is contrary to the way of life and teachings and example of Christ; they always **raise doubts** about the **reality** of the resurrection and of the Church.

- ✍ After all, if Christ **didn't** rise from the dead, He has no more authority over our lives than Socrates or Confucius or Buddha or Mohammad, or even Dr Phil.
- ✍ But, Jesus **did** rise from the dead. His victory over evil and falsehood and injustice and suffering is **total**, incontrovertible, and **irreversible**.
- ✍ In the face of twenty centuries filled with a steady stream of saints, an unchecked growth of the Catholic Church, and an unquenchable Christian vitality, how can a person deny it?

ILLUSTRATION: “Contact” – Do you believe, or not?

If you know me, you know that I'm a big sci-fi fan – *Star Trek*, space adventures, life in outer space – it all fascinates me. So, back in the mid-90's I was really excited about a movie coming out: a movie called "Contact."

- ✍ It's a story about Ellie Arroway, an astronomer, who is working on a radio-telescope project to discover life "out there" in the universe.
- ✍ She and her team stumble across a radio message from space that, surprisingly, has instructions embedded in it.
- ✍ The instructions tell them how to build a machine that will help them travel to the planet from which the message originated.
- ✍ After much coaxing, everyone around the world gets "on board" and contributes to help build the machine – to discover the truth about life in outer space.
- ✍ Part of the story involves Ellie's involvement with a young preacher, Palmer.
- ✍ We discover, as the story unfolds, that Ellie is an agnostic – someone who isn't sure whether God exists or not – so they decide not to decide.
- ✍ "We can't PROVE that God exists" Ellie tells Palmer "so until someone can prove it to me, I won't decide to believe in God."
- ✍ The travel machine is built – and Ellie is chosen to be the first to travel to this new world in outer space.
- ✍ She's transported there and discovers incredible things on this "other world." She learns many things about the wonders of the universe and, as a result, about humanity.
- ✍ Ellie spent about 2 weeks on this other planet before returning back to earth.
- ✍ BUT, here on earth, Ellie had spent only a matter of minutes in the machine.
- ✍ No one believed Ellie's story. She couldn't prove it to anyone – but she knew her experience was real.
- ✍ The only person who did believe her was her preacher friend, Palmer – the one who had a lot of experience believing in something that could not be proved... or can it be?

Christ's resurrection is what makes Christianity able to be proven.

Jesus Christ claimed to have the secret to eternal life, to a lastingly meaningful life, to the kind of happiness that we all yearn for with all our being.

- ✍ Others have made similar claims: Buddha, Confucius, Mohammad,
- ✍ And yet, have any of them passed the test? Even one?

Only Christ has won the **irreversible** victory and shown **undeniable** credibility, by rising from the dead.

Explanation: Meanings of Easter Vigil Symbols

Easter deals with things unimaginable and beyond our experience and so the Church strives to help the experience of Easter to come alive for us by presenting us with vivid signs and symbols to contemplate – to point to things our words cannot express...

✍ Light –

- the fire,
- the Easter Candle (a symbol of life in the midst of a dark church)
- are actually ways of praising the One who proved to be the victor over death:
- light conquers darkness, as we heard in the first reading, light and dark are separated – and Christ’s resurrection promises that, even in the face of death (and darkness), the light will shine.
- Death is not the end – nor does it destroy the bonds forged in our lives – for resurrection still lies ahead – new life is yet to come – the Spirit, who is sent forth, renews the face of the earth and brings hope, even in the darkness of death.

✍ Water – water is also a symbol of the resurrection.

- Water can be a threat, a weapon of death.
- Yet, at the same time, living springs of water can be signs of hope and life to people traveling across the desert.
- Springs of water mean fruitfulness, an oasis of life in the middle of the dessert.
- This is what the water of the Red Sea of the 3rd reading does.
- The water kills the evil, and yet at the same time is the means of saving God’s people from slavery and death.
- This, for Karen & Arlis who are being baptized tonight, is what is about to happen to them – as they are freed from the slavery of sin and brought into the new life of God as His chosen children.
- And yet, for the Israelites, passing through the Red Sea was only the start of the journey through the desert – and it is the same for them – as it has been all of us, baptized years ago.
- Our journey of faith only *began* at baptism.
- Now, for many more years, they will have to travel through the desert of this world looking for the water that will truly refresh – living water flowing from Jesus’ side in the Church – in the Sacraments.

✍ The image of a lamb:

- The resurrection of Christ invites us to have our eyes fixed on the heavens.
- Look at what happened to Abraham in the 2nd reading.
- He is ready to sacrifice his own son – his only son.
- Obedient to God’s command, he was completely ready to give everything that he had, even all his hopes for the future, to God.
- The words of Isaac are very important for us tonight – “Father, everything is ready, but where is the sacrifice?” ‘God will provide’” Responds Abraham.
- And **how God has provided!**
- He gave us **His** on son to be sacrificed for us. His only Son, Jesus, gave His live on the cross in order to give us a share in His life.

- In the 4th reading, we heard how God has great compassion for us. Once in a while, we can feel abandoned, but God, Isaiah reminds us, never abandons us – He is always at our side full of compassion and love. He just wants that we change our conduct, our lives – in order to live, not for ourselves, but for HIM.
 - Isaac and Abraham saw the lamb that God had given them in place of Isaac – but we see not just a lamb, but Christ – the Lamb of God.
 - He gave himself to us as the Lamb.
 - This same lamb is seated in the heavens, as we hear the Book of Revelation, “the lamb was seated on a throne amidst the elders – and the lamb had been slain.”
 - Tonight, in the midst of the darkness, in the darkness of this world, we look to the heavens – to the eternal promise of God – that we will rise one day – if we always keep our eyes fixed on the Lamb who is in the Sacraments and who works through the Church.
- ✍ But most important of all the symbols and signs is that which Mary Magdalene finds in tonight’s Gospel – the empty tomb.
 - ✍ “Do not be frightened. I know you are looking for Jesus, but he is not here. He has been raised as he promised.”
 - ✍ These are words that, although they are beyond our personal experience, are words that fill us with excitement and expectation – words that lift us up from the depths of our fears, of our sin, of our darkness, and bring us the light of hope, the light of resurrection.
 - ✍ This is indeed the night on which we can cry out with joy “Alleluia” the Lord is truly risen! All is changed! Life is new (as it will soon be for you, Matt, as you officially join the Church tonight and become a Catholic)!

Now, the Easter challenge is to live these new lives – every day – never giving in to the fears that the darkness bring, but living in the joy and light of Christ’s resurrection.

Today, the greatest night of the year – the night of the resurrection, let's honor the Lord not only with our voices, but also in our hearts. Let's promise him that between now and Pentecost we will use our creativity **to keep our eyes fixed on heaven** – to live as **new people, redeemed people, people re-created**. And let's ask God to put our skepticism and doubt behind us – **believe, and LIVE** the new life Christ gains for us through His glorious resurrection from the dead.