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THE RESURRECTION

By REV. WILFRED HURLEY, C.S.P.




Christ Rising from the Tomb

THE PAULIST PRESS

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By

REV. WILFRED G. HURLEY, C.S.P.

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THE RESURRECTION

*"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection,
and the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. iii. 10).*

"Earth grew still at sinking twilight;
The twilight gloomier;
Stiller the earth.
Broad ghastly shadows . . .
Flowed troublous over the mountains.
Dumb withdrew the fowls of Heaven to
the depths of the forest;
Beasts of the fields stole fearful to hide
in the loneliest caverns.
Even the worm slunk down.
In the air reigned deathlike silence."

The "Galilæan" has been conquered.
The victory is complete.

Over the living crucifix, on Calvary's Mount,
the great angel of death slowly folded its sombre,
black wings.

Its writhing victim was stilled.

A dead body shook in the chill evening wind,
drooping gaunt against the black sky.

"Never man spake as this man." But He
would speak no more.

No more would the forces of evil, the blind

leaders of the blind, be lashed by that terrible tongue.

No more would they shrink at His truthful invectives. Invectives which scorched their very souls.

“Whited sepulchres.”

“Serpents.”

“Hypocrites.”

“Blind and leaders of the blind.”

“You have made void the commandments of God.”

But, on the other hand, no more would be heard His gentle-voiced words of mercy.

“What wilt thou, that I should do, unto you?”

And then to the lame:

“Arise, take up thy bed, and walk.”

To the sick, the suffering, to the lepers:

“Thy faith hath made thee whole.”

To those, with that leprosy of the soul, mortal sin:

“Go in peace, thy sins are forgiven thee.”

“He went about doing good.” But those feet ripped and torn by the great spikes could never walk again.

“Never was the like seen in Israel.” But He would be seen no more.

The “Infamous thing” was at an end.

They who had walked with Him? Where were they?

One was a suicide. Fearsomely swinging, a halter around his neck, in a lonely ravine. His body burst. A sight chilling the blood.

Another had run away in terror.

Another had denied Him with an oath.

And the rest? It did not matter. The turmoil was over. They were gone. Cowardly, ignorant, deluded. Scattered far and wide, crawling back into their little towns. Mocked, jeered, hooted, thankful that their miserable lives had been spared. They had been taught a bitter lesson, and no doubt, they knew it well.

It was the end of Him and His.

And so night descended.

And Saturday, just another day, followed by another night.

HE IS RISEN

“And when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalen and Mary the Mother of Jesus and Salome brought sweet spices that coming they might anoint Jesus. And very early in the morning the first day of the week they came to the sepulchre, the sun being now risen. And they said one to another: ‘Who shall roll us back the stone from the door of the sepulchre?’ And looking they saw the stone

rolled back, for it was great. And entering into the sepulchre, they saw a young man sitting on the right, clothed with a white robe, and they were astonished, who said to them, 'Be not afrightened; you seek Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified. HE IS RISEN!' "

That clarion call. Those living words from the living angel of the living God, can never have an equal. By it the worst defeat in the history of humanity was changed into its greatest victory.

The experience that followed that cry utterly transferred the morale of the first disciples. Across their dazed and bewildered minds flashed the awful truth that the great prophecy of the ages had been fulfilled. The words of the Christ had been proven. "He has risen as He said." He had proved that He was the Son of God spoken of by the prophets in Holy Writ. That His teaching and sayings were those of the God-Head. . . . That He was divine. All the cures, all the miracles, all the works that He had performed now took on their full import. That dreadful scene on that first "Good Friday" stood revealed as an ordered part of God's divine plan to redeem the world. That He being lifted up on the Cross of Redemption, would "lift all men to Himself." Indeed "This was the Son of God." Well might men strike their breasts in compunction and terror. The crucifixion had been that of a God. A God Who had re-

deemed the world. That dreadful suffering and death on the Cross to teach us the terrible truth of God's fearful justice, if it had not been necessary was at least inevitable. That we "May know Him, and the Power of His Resurrection."

And so came the transformation. They had been demoralized as well as terrorized and disappointed that fateful day. But now despair gave way to hope. Fear melted before Faith. They had been shattered, scattered like a flock of frightened sheep. But now, that call to arms—to faith—to victory—"He is risen."

THE POWER OF HIS RESURRECTION

And they were transformed. Electrified. Swept to their feet. An organized band. Courageous beyond belief. Unflinching. Heroes all. No longer servants but friends. Even more, partaking of His Sonship. They too, living sons of the Living God.

The days of weeping and mourning and doubt were to be no more. Could the children of the Bridegroom mourn as long as the Bridegroom was with them? "He is risen." He was with them, to be with them all days. "Emmanuel." God with us. Forever.

So too, their ideals were changed by this Easter Morning. No longer seeking for thrones and

crowns and a kingdom of this world. With God leading them to the hilltops of vision they saw the world in its stark reality. They saw the tinsel as tinsel. The sham as sham. Life, not as it is in the dreams of fools and children, but in its stern truth. They looked for, and worked for, and were willing, or rather eager to die for, this Kingdom of God. This spiritual kingdom. This kingdom that was "not of this world."

With "The Power of His Resurrection" the minds of those untrained and unlettered men were quickened. Their words and witness became classic utterances of the religious life of the world. These transformed peasants and transfigured fishermen became the leaders of the world.

THE POWER OF AN ENDLESS LIFE

Because He lived, they too would live, forever. Henceforth, they feared not what men could do to their bodies for they *could not touch their souls*. Having felt the "Power of His Resurrection," they also would know the fellowship of His sufferings. Henceforth, they would throw themselves with reckless and utter abandon into the program of carrying the Gospel to every creature, thinking only of teaching all nations.

The Apostle who had run away—after a lifetime of martyrdom, in exile, on a bleak and

desolate coast, an old worn-out man, he could no longer *speak*. No! Then he must *write* that "Men may know that Jesus is the Christ."

The Apostle who had denied his master with an oath, ending his life on the sands of an arena. Recoiling in horror, it is true, when he saw the cross erected for his own crucifixion. But not from fear, nor dread. He welcomed his martyrdom, but to die as his Master had died. No! He felt it almost a sacrilege. He was too unworthy. And tears again flowed down the two great furrows in his leathery cheeks. Furrows which a lifetime of remorseful tears had cleft. Came the strange pleading: Would they crucify Him, head to the ground? Laughingly they granted his request.

And so with the others.

St. Andrew going forth to plant the faith in Scythia and Greece, and at the end of years of toil to win a martyr's crown. After suffering a cruel scourging at Patræ in Archaia, he was left, bound by cords, to die upon a cross. When St. Andrew first caught sight of the gibbet in which he was to die, he greeted the precious wood with joy. "O, good cross!" he cried, "made beautiful by the limbs of Christ, so long desired, now so happily found! Receive me into thy arms, and present me to my Master, that He Who redeemed me through thee, may now accept me from thee." Two whole days the martyr remained hanging on this cross alive,

preaching with outstretched arms from this chair of truth, to all who came near, and entreating them not to hinder his passion.

Thus with St. Thomas, a spear plunged into his apostolic heart.

Thus with St. Matthias, stoned and beheaded.

Or St. Jude, his skin literally torn from his flesh, by the sea shells in the hands of his diabolical executioners.

All, going through life absolutely unafraid of what men could do to them. Courage, superb and sublime, animated them to do and to dare anything. Persecutions, the stake, the arena, the wild beasts, the Cross. . . . "All these had lost their terror, for the disciples were immortal." They knew the Power of the Resurrection and welcomed the fellowship of Christ's suffering.

It was the glory of these heroes of Heaven. It was their one thought. It was the principal subject of their sermons. They stressed it above everything else. That it was so. That they were witnesses. Witnesses of the resurrection. And because they knew it was true, they joyfully endured stripes, prison, even death. So that the word for witness, "Martyr," has become for Christians the name of one who laid down his life for his faith. But in the beginning it was not so. It meant one who bore witness to that which he had seen with his own eyes, heard with his own ears,

handled with his own hands . . . Jesus risen from the dead. The word of life-victorious over death.

Down through the centuries the heart of Christianity has throbbed with this great force. Thus the greatest of those who followed the original twelve, the great Paul. St. Paul who came into the fold from holding the coats of the murderers of the stoned Stephen, "If Christ be not risen again then are we the most miserable of men." But because Christ had risen again he could cry until his time should end: "That I may live to God; with Christ I am nailed to the cross."

"I know that my Redeemer liveth." It has been the rallying cry of the faithful. The strength and consolation of those who have kept the Faith since then, through the centuries of bloody persecution in which the faithful have been dragged from their homes, from their loved ones, scourged, burned, suffering under the worst and most diabolical torments.

FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST

And when the lust to kill had somewhat abated, abated through the influence of the "Lamb of God," Who had been slain, that everlasting sacrifice, the same thought inspired those to whom, in many cases, death perhaps would have been easier.

Thus in the fifth century, the great St. Augustine would speak of the life beyond the grave.

Deeming it as nothing to surrender his honored position as the head of an heretical sect, resolutely pushing aside the companions of his sins to seat himself as a little child before a teacher of the true philosophy. To live a life of unbelievable austerity and repentance. It was his great thought. "*The Magna Cogitatio*," he called it.

THE SECRET OF SANCTITY

Down the ages it continued, the secret of sanctity. Thus Ruskin tells us of his sojourn in the Alps. Of the glorious beauty of the mountains. And of a trappist monk who dwelt there. One of those saintly men who conquer the kingdom of Heaven by violence. Who push open the Gates of Heaven with strong and firm arms. "I didn't come here to look at the mountains," was the abrupt answer of the stern monk to the nineteenth century aesthete. "What then? You must think of something, my shaven friend, or go mad?" "I think of the glory of the world to come," was the reply.

On the other extreme, Little Theresa, "The Little Flower of Jesus," as she called herself, always speaking of God and His love. Of dwelling with God for Eternity. Not as a hope, a desire, a wish, but as an assured fact. "My Heaven," she would speak of it.

Coming closer home, those saintly men of God

who brought the Faith to the long abandoned children of the forest. To those first Americans. And not a few of them suffering martyrdom in their pleadings with their red brothers. They came as messengers of an immortal life, crossing the trackless forests, fording the treacherous streams, braving the infinite forms of cruelty, brutishness and filthiness. Men of noble blood, finished scholarship, wealth and reputation. Deliberately putting such aside to choose poverty and suffering, exile and oblivion, ingratitude, torture and death itself. Why all this? They would answer in the words of their patron: "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen, are temporal: but the things which are not seen, are eternal" (2 Cor. iv. 18).

Even in our own times. A priest or brother, his life dedicated to God, setting sail for that bleak and desolate island, that living Hell on earth, the isle of lepers, Molokai, to end his days among the suffering and sorrow, filth and stench of disease that kills by decay. Or a gentle voiced Sister of Mercy, with her face of peace, bidding farewell to her loved ones, to dedicate her life to the works of charity. The source of their fortitude? "The Power of His Resurrection!" "That the sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come."

Even to those for whom the light of true faith may have been somewhat dimmed. It is their most cherished thought, their most loved hope.

Thus Dickens, with his halting Christianity, in his most compelling of stories, *The Tale of Two Cities*, introduces to us Sidney Carton, one of his greatest heroes.

Sidney Carton's early years had been spent aimlessly and without care. Over that life could be written one word to sum it all, "Wasted." Then there came into his life the love of a woman. And she was the wife of another. And this is so different from the everlasting triangle story of the movies and the modern novel. Charles Darney, the husband, is condemned to death by the French Revolutionists. Sidney Carton goes to prison just before the execution, and secretly takes Darney's place and dies on the gibbet for him.

But back of this act of heroism and sacrifice is the power of an endless life. For the words which ennobled him for this act of sacrifice, the words which steeled his soul for his terrifying death, were the words which he had heard at his father's grave.

They whispered in his ears. They were emblazoned on cloud and sky. They were written across the houses. They burned into the night. Everywhere he heard them. Every place he saw them:

“I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in Me though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.”

And we know in the quietness of his heart, in those depths that only God Himself can search, it was the “Power of the Resurrection” that made Carton willing, desirous to undergo also, the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings.

And the *great fact of immortality* has nerved not only Sidney Carton, but many another to heroic sacrifice.

Descending lower in Faith and Hope, to those who doubt and despair. Even they must admit the only saving power in life, is this same “Power of His Resurrection.

For instance Goethe, with his hero, Faust. Faust is about to empty the vial of poison and end his excruciating doubts, when the bells of Easter morn break in upon his fearful resolve, and he hears the triumphant hymn of the resurrection: “Christ is risen from the dead.”

And after all, such books of literature are but written expressions of the thoughts and wishes and experiences of such men, giving expression to that joyous and uplifting belief, which they have encountered, in countless millions. From all climes and nations, of all times and generations: “I be-

lieve in life everlasting." "But if Christ is not risen again . . . your faith is vain." Trace it out as you will, "all roads lead to Rome." But through Rome, along that one straight thoroughfare back to Calvary's cross and the "Power of His Resurrection."

IMMORTALITY THE GREAT LIFE INCENTIVE

The question of immortality is not simply an academic, metaphysical discussion. It is fraught with terrific and tremendous results.

One of the most crushing and cramping beliefs of to-day is a blind alley and not a thoroughfare. It is the source of more restlessness, cynicism, insanity and suicide, than any other single cause. If man is only a machine. A mechanical being. If he is only ninety-eight cents worth of chemicals, if life is only just one thing after another, if dust and ashes are all that there is, then the game is not worth the candle and life is not worth the living.

If man is only a beast, then let us live like beasts . . . teeth, claw, passion, appetite, and all. . . . Eating, drinking, and making merry for tomorrow we die. This is life. There is no other. You cannot escape the lash. "You are the galley-slave, with the cannon-ball tied to your ankle, and the warder over you with whip or musket, and the oar in your bleeding hands." There is no mending matters. It is destiny. Fate. There is

no hope. Nothing avails. Tears and prayers and penance profit nothing. Life is inexorable. We cannot say: "Our Father," for we have none. And when the lash falls, yield to it. Swallow your tears with your bread. There is but one relief—the grave. And the sooner we fill it, the better.

Take away the supreme worth of man's life as expressed in immortality and life becomes cheap. Murder becomes more of an expedient than a crime. Virtue as its own reward cannot stand the test, despite all external gloss and glitter and shallow verbiage. There must be some higher end, that we may live above the sordid aims of debased worldings. That groveling in the mire we may take hope and strive to lead lives worthy of the children of God.

THE CHALLENGE OF TO-DAY

The great challenge to the world to-day is rapidly resolving itself into this. Shall we accept the resurrection, the power of an endless life, or not? Christianity has never asked an unbelieving world to accept a theory of immortality, in the resurrection of Christ. It presents a fact. The disciples who witnessed it, did not theorize. They saw and heard. They knew it was truth because in their own experience they knew it was a fact, and sealed the truth of their experiences by the seal of their own life-blood.

In all ages, since the first Easter dawn, men's minds have sought to explain the manner of the resurrection. Even sought to explain it away. But denials do not silence truth. The outstanding fact remains. And it was the fact of the resurrection that changed scoffers into believers. And believers into martyrs.

Hence, the world cannot say: Do not believe it. It simply asks, ignore it. Or forget it. At least be indifferent to it. Give up your faith for indifference. Give up your ideals of purity and goodness for licentiousness and vice. Your hopes of eternal life for the luxury, sensuality, and the excitement of sin.

But before us stands the risen Christ. With flashing eyes He insists, to a world which vainly compromises, that there is no compromise. "If you would enter into everlasting Life, keep the commandments."

And the commandments are adamant. They are not requests. Nor are they suggestions. Nor counsels. There are commandments, commanded by God. You can by no means fit them in with the license which modern freedom demands. Nor with the dishonesty and legal swindling that modern business demands. Nor with the treachery which modern competition demands. Nor with the beastliness and betrayal of our higher powers which modern pleasure demands. Nor with cal-

lousness of conscience, and hardness of heart which are the essential conditions of worldly success. There is no compromise with God. You cannot do it. Reflex principles will not help you. "It was on stone, not on water the commandments were written, and the 'still small voice' thunders above the clamor that would stifle it."

THE FAITH THAT SAVES

But with the "Power of the Resurrection" the commandments can and will be kept. Once let its truth sink into a soul, no trick, no deceit, no sophistry can ever loosen its grasp. All things become easy with the help of Him Who rose again. Once it becomes a fact and experience in our lives, then we gladly enter deeply, even sacrificially, into the trials and sufferings of this valley of tears and shadows. Knowing that "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man to conceive the joys which God has laid up for those who love Him."

And thus the risen Christ cries out to those who would hear. "To souls sick unto death with the modern atrophy of skepticism and unbelief. Learned men, with the faculties dried up and impoverished by the exclusive use of their critical faculties. Students in universities, young men, striving to get ahead in the world, and somewhat

disgusted by the means they have to employ to do so. Young ladies in the world, whose hearts are sick with its hollowness and their own degradation." For only with the assurance of the future life, and the "Power of His Resurrection" in their souls, is life endurable to them. Only thus can they take up their cross and follow Him. Only thus can they deny themselves. Only thus can they "do penance." Only thus live "in the world—and not of it."

But with the "Power of His Resurrection" life takes on a different meaning. For inseparably joined with "the Power of His Resurrection," comes the recognition of the necessity of the "fellowship of His sufferings." They live in Christ, with Christ, and by Christ. And Christ risen again. Thus the yoke, however heavy, becomes light. And the burden, however galling, becomes sweet. "The third day He rose again from the dead." "He is risen." "I believe in life everlasting."

FACE THE FACTS

The richest man in the world was asked: "To what do you attribute your unparalleled success?" He answered: "I never deceived myself." "I always faced facts, as facts." Hence, having been created by God, as intelligent and reasoning men and women, we must face facts in worldly affairs,

and the same obligation rests upon each and every one of us in spiritual affairs.

The one outstanding fact is that we have been created above all other things in the world. We are the lords of this world, created just a little lower than the angels. All things have been put here to serve us. We are the masters. Intelligent, reasoning men and women.

In life, we never attain lasting happiness. Happiness soon passes. And only sorrow remains, remains, and remains. We are in truth, "Tried as it were by fire." No man living, but has asked himself the question: "I wonder what it is all about?" Life seems so hard. And yet so futile. What are we here upon earth for anyway? Surely not just to work, and work hard for a span of years. To raise others for a life just as hard and trying. And at the end of our life, old age with its mockery. The illness of life, the sickness and the suffering. The dread of poverty and all that it implies and at the end horrible death, only as those who dread annihilation can dread it.

"Times passes," said St. John, "and the things of the world pass with it." And with the passing, we too. Every hour we acquire more and more the characteristics that make us, give us, the name "old." Every hour is bringing us closer to that moment when we must follow Christ into the valley of the unknown. Every minute is pushing us

relentlessly on and on. Frantically as we strive, we cannot bring back a single second.

Intelligent, reasoning men that we are, God demands that we face these facts and make the resultant choice of life. We cannot live as those who live "Having no hope of the promise, and without God in this world." For we are now, "Children of Light." And that Light is the Light of our Faith. Faith that "He is risen." And with the "Power of His Resurrection," into our souls also comes the understanding of the "fellowship of His sufferings." Whatever trials, sufferings, misunderstanding, sorrows, and unhappiness comes into our lives we know they are a part of God's well-ordered plan. We know "That somehow good, shall be the final goal of evil." And

"Whatsoever God doth . . .

He doth it for my good." . . .

And though the way be long, and dark, dreary and comfortless, if we but glance at the ground we shall see footsteps of One Who went before—and if we but notice more closely those footprints we shall see traces of blood—and to one side of the path, the torn-up earth where He too, has dragged a Cross.

Among the families of Morocco there are many who still treasure the keys to homes in Spain from which they were driven 1,200 years ago. Once a year they bring out the key and show it to their children as a token of the time to come when their exile will be over and they fondly dream of returning to dwell there again. And the mountains which haunt their sleep will welcome their wakening, and sorrow and sighing shall flee before them as they live and rule in that glory which their forefathers forfeited, in the days of old.

Likewise, once a year, as Easter with all its glory returns year after year, it shows forth to us the "key" to our Faith, "The Power of His Resurrection." That key which unlocks the gates of death. And we look into the great beyond at the glory which shall surely be ours. And the "Mansion" which shall surely be our own.

So heartened and cheered we go forth again to serve, to sacrifice, to struggle. To battle sin and temptation. To fight the good fight. To keep the Faith, unsullied, glorious, victorious.

To live with Christ. That we may die with Christ. And in this death there is no sting. For whosoever loses his life shall find it. For we know that our Redeemer liveth. For He that was dead is alive again. "And behold He will go before you into Galilee: there you shall see Him."

And we triumphant, shall follow to Galilee,

and beyond. To Launch out into the deep" to that . . .

“. . . empyrean Heaven, extended wide,
In circuit, undetermined square or round,
With opal towers and battlements adorned,
Of living sapphire.

and there, behold:

. . . The Almighty Father from above
From the pure empyrean where He sits,
High throned above all height,
Bend down his eye . . . approvingly . . .

Joining all those sanctities of Heaven
Who stand about, thick as stars,—
And from His sight receive
Beatitude past utterance.”

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