

Quasimodogeniti, the 2nd Sunday of Easter
May 1, 2011

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Minneapolis, Minnesota

+ Jesu juva +

CHRIST'S RESURRECTION - THE SOURCE OF OUR VICTORY

Ezekiel 37:1-14; I John 5:4-12; John 20:19-31

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

Where is the evidence? Where is the evidence that Christ has accomplished any sort of victory? When one looks at the state of our world, of our American society, we do not easily see any evidence that Christ the Lord has defeated the world. If anything it appears the other way around. The world as opposed to Christ seems on the ascendancy. The society in which we live grows less and less Christian year by year, purposely distancing itself from any sort of Christian orthodoxy in terms of faith and lifestyle, rejecting the historic preaching of the Church in regard to both morality and the Faith, eschewing even the acknowledgment of the influence of the Church on Western civilization. The world will not tolerate it. And soon it may not tolerate you either, if you stand firm in the faith.

But surely within the Church we see the victory of Christ. Is this not, after all, a refuge from the world, where its machinations and deceptions are rejected in favor of brotherhood, truth and love? It certainly ought to be. And yet we find that often times the challenges to Christ and His Word are greater within the Church than without. It is for good reason that we are warned that the spirit of the antichrist comes from within the Church. And so the Church faces the things St. Paul warns against in Galatians 5: "hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies", and all of the other works of the flesh, things that ought not be found among Christian people. And when one sees such things at work, causing rifts in the fellowship of the faithful and even threatening to silence the proclamation of the Gospel in specific places, one can begin to wonder, where is Christ's victory?

And so the Christian wonders, is all of this Easter stuff just empty pomp and celebration? Do the alleluias and festal proclamations mean anything for us? Has our Lord truly conquered our world, our flesh, and our enemies?

Such questions surely must have been on the minds of the apostles as they huddled in fear in that upper room on the first Easter day. Even though they had heard the testimony of the women that the tomb was empty and that an angel had appeared to them proclaiming Jesus to be alive; even though two of their comrades had claimed to have seen Jesus alive as they journeyed toward Emmaus, even though Jesus Himself had said that He would rise from the dead,

they did not see any victory. They had watched Him as He was betrayed by His own people, by the ones who were supposed to be the leaders of the church of their day; as He was handed over to the powers of this world in the persons of the Roman procurator and soldiers; as He suffered, as He died. And so that sat in that room, afraid of their world, afraid of their church, hiding.

But then at evening Jesus comes to them through the closed doors, and shows Himself alive, and says to them: "Peace be with you". And this was not just some nice sentiment. This was an authoritative declaration from the One who had just broken the power of the grave, rising victorious over sin, over the powers of the world, over the devil, and over all His enemies. He could declare this peace to them because He had fought for it and had won it. The war, as it were, was decided in this one great ultimate battle. They need no longer huddle in fear. What could the enemy now possibly do to them? Oh they would still be harried and harassed. They would suffer and die even at the hands of these enemies. But what had been given them, that victory, that peace, could never be snatched away from them, for Christ had risen from the dead! And in His resurrection and victory was their resurrection and victory.



Moreover, He gives to them the power and the authority and the command even to spread His victory and His peace to others, giving them the Office of the Keys, the authority and power to forgive sins to the penitent faithful and to retain sins to the unrepentant. In this ordination He breathes on them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, and by the Spirit proclaim and preach the Gospel of forgiveness, of victory and of peace to others.

And the first hearer of their proclamation, so far as we have record of it, is Thomas, one of their own who was not with them that first Easter evening. But Thomas does not heed their words. They seem to be but wishful thinking, fantasy, delusion even. Thomas wants to see the evidence of this victory of Christ himself. And so he says: "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Well, you have heard from St. John what happened next. Jesus comes again and proves Himself alive and victorious to Thomas too. He shows Thomas His wounds, commands the apostle to touch them, that He too might at last believe. The witness of his fellow apostles was not delusion or fantasy, but fact. And Thomas, seeing, hearing and touching, this proof of Christ's victory and resurrection finally believes and confesses "My Lord and my God!"

Now the witness of those apostles is proclaimed to us. This witness comes to us through the Scriptures they have written and handed over to us, which are the basis for the Church's faith and preaching. So St. John says: "...these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name." And these words of the Holy Scriptures are not fantasy or myth or delusion either. They are truth and they give life. For we are not dealing with the mere words and stories of men, but with the Word of God. Given through men, yes; but divine and powerful nonetheless.

The Word of God alone has the power to bring the victory and peace of Christ to you, to make that victory and peace yours through the forgiveness of your sins and the new resurrected life in spirit that results. As in the vision of Ezekiel we heard this morning, the Word of God when it is preached can bring that which is dead and dried up back to life and vitality. It can do this because God the Holy Spirit is present with it and attendant upon it. Thus, the Word is powerful; it changes us, bringing us to repentance, cleansing us from our old sins, giving us new life, and empowering and sustaining that life too. It is just as King David said in Psalm 18: "by You I can run against a troop, by my God I can leap over a wall. As for God, His way is perfect; The word of the Lord is proven; He is a shield to all who trust in Him." This is victory language! And if you don't see it, read the rest of the Psalm where David is armed by God and strengthened and destroys his enemies. And so by God's Word we are changed and made victorious too over our enemies - over sin, over death, over the devil, and over this world too.

And this Word which changes us also has the power to change the whole Church. If the Church will but hear it, she will repent when she is unfaithful and worldly, will trust the power of Christ's Word and of the Holy Spirit, and will not waver in her confession and work. Moreover the Word has the power also to change the hearts even of our enemies, both those in the world and those within the Church. For what were we before we believed? We were the enemies of God and of Christ. We were of the world and of the devil. But by the power of His Gospel that was given and proclaimed to us, we were changed and made new. The same power is always at work in the Gospel, so that even the most hateful and malicious enemy of God can be made into a faithful son.

And this Word comes to us in a threefold manner, a threefold witness on earth. "there are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and the blood; and these three agree as one." And these three, the Spirit who is active in the preaching of the Word; the water, where by the power of the Word attached to it, the Spirit imparts resurrection and life to the baptized; and the blood, where again by the Word spoken over the cup of wine Christ's life-giving blood is given us to drink in the Sacrament of the altar, the witness of God is given to us. And what is that witness? It is the witness that Christ is victorious, and that receiving these gifts faithfully and Christ Himself through them, we

are victorious too. Here God testifies that our sins are truly forgiven and that we are truly declared and made righteous by Christ. Here He bears witness that He loves us and will not let us be trampled to the dust by this world or by our enemies, but has vouchsafed heaven itself to us as a place of eternal refuge and peace. Here He bears witness that though the enemies of God rage against us, they have been defeated and that the war is already won. And St. John reasons: "If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son." Again, "these are written that you may believe..."

Though the world be turning against the church, though you see corruption and scheming and unfaithfulness in the church, though you find trouble and doubts in your own souls, know this: Christ has truly done this. The evidence is clear. He has risen from the dead and has brought you forgiveness, life, and victory! And in His victory we have true and lasting peace, who appeared to the women and to the disciples on the Emmaus Road, who showed Himself to the apostles, who commanded Thomas to touch His wounds, to whom be all honor and glory now and forever! Amen.

+ Soli Deo gloria +