

Maundy Thursday
St. Mary's Church, Denver, Colorado
March 20, 2008

“Servant of Servants”

An Homily by The Rt. Rev'd. D. Presley Hutchens

Then cometh he to Simon Peter. And Peter saith unto him: Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him: What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shall know here after. Peter saith unto him: Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him: If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him: Lord not my feet only but my hands and my head. Jesus saith unto him: He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit. And ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he: Ye are not all clean. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them: Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.

I am most grateful for the opportunity to speak here on the occasion of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Day. It is my intention to present a series of four homilies centered upon the New Testament revelations of who Jesus was. I have titled tonight's homily "Servant of Servants." Tomorrow's homily is titled "King of the Jews." The homily for Easter Even is titled "the Paschal Lamb", and Easter's homily is titled "the Risen Lord." I hope you are able to attend each service, and, that you will find something in them of use in your spiritual journey. It is to this end that I would like to begin with the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O Lord, our heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, We beseech thee to bless all who, following in his steps, give themselves to the service of their fellow men. Endue them with wisdom, patience, and courage to strengthen the weak and raise up those who fall; that, being inspired by thy love, they may worthily minister in thy Name to the suffering, the friendless, and the needy; for the sake of him who laid down his life for us, the same thy Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

In setting the framework for these four homilies, I want us to look to the first of the two creation narratives found in the Book of Genesis. A close examination of the text, especially when looking at the Hebrew wording, reveals several insights that most of us, perhaps, are not aware of.

First, the use of the Hebrew word *nephesh*, representing the Spirit of God that "hovers" or, more accurately, *broods* over the face of the deep, is not understood as the

WORD of God. It is more accurately understood as the life giving *breath* of God. It is as though the world is completely dead, in darkness, without form and void, and, God breathes life into it from his own nostrils. An image more readily available to us today is that of CPR or using one's own breath to save the life of another.

Secondly, and most interesting, is the author's use of the Hebrew word *bara* which is generally rendered *chaos*. It probably best means *to create*. When used in the Old Testament, it is used exclusively to identify divine activity through which God brings order. This is the most important point of all I have to say during these very holy several days. You must not miss what I am saying here. The first step in God's divine activity toward creating a new order is the creation of *chaos*.

I certainly understand that the narrative is generally understood to represent our God creating something from nothing, *ex nihilo* as a philosopher may phrase it. However, surely we can logically know that there was something, for the narrative itself refers to *darkness, the face of the deep, and, the face of the waters*. Surely we cannot understand the narrative to say that creation came from a vacuum. And, it is in this sense that we must make the implication that there was something in place. That something that was in place was completely dark, wet, without form, and void of life or activity. Yet, we must understand that it was, in some sense, orderly. It simply was what it was. It was without creative activity or divine purpose.

This notion that God begins his divine and creative activity with chaos is reinforced at various places in the revelation of God in Holy Scripture. Jesus certainly understood this in the parable of pouring new wine into old wine skins. In the sacred verse of both the Old and New Testaments, we see many accounts of God bringing chaos to create a new order. The flood, the plagues visited upon Egypt, especially the deaths of the first born and the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Sea of Reeds, would certainly have appeared as *chaos*. This week's lection refers to the Temple veil being "rent in twain from top to bottom", the earthquake and the "rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." That would certainly be understood by most of us as *chaos*.

Tonight, we remember the very beginnings of the Eucharist. It is for us, just as for the Jews, a Passover, a bridge over which we move from the captivity of sin and the sting of death, to adoption as heirs with Christ. We move from hopelessness to the sure hope of the Resurrection. We are His witnesses to the new world order. We are bought at the priceless sacrifice of his own blessed Son who, was without sin and perfect in every way. His blood covered cross is the pillar by which the new Israel passes, just as the old Israel passed beneath the door posts painted with the blood of the sacrificial lambs into their exodus and ultimate arrival into the Holy City. Again, through chaos, God brings a new creation into being.

Jesus, his disciples and friends, are gathered in the upper room for the Passover. He has made a triumphant entry into the Holy City, been recognized as the blessed one

who comes in the Name of the Lord, to the tumultuous ringing of hosannas. He has had a run in with the moneychangers, those who seek to profit from God's loving covenant with his own. The Chief Priests are now in counsel about what to do with him.

As he sits at the table and recites this very holy feast, as it had been recited since the exodus by every faithful Jew, and still is today, he ushers in a new world order, a new covenant and creates a new Israel with the addition of the words we hear tonight—"this is my body, this is my blood, which is given for you." We may hear in the recess of our mind the echoing of the words of Jesus that John records. "Greater love hath no man, than that he lay down his life for his friends." Even though they may not have understood, surely all of the disciples must have sensed they were on the verge of something not experienced before. We now know that they did not understand until much later.

I want us to look for a moment at the *Maundy*, the washing of feet. This was an ancient custom in the middle-east reserved for those honored guests that may occasionally visit your home. It was a sign of immense respect and affection. It was not about some concern that the house might be tracked up. In fact, many homes had earthen floors. It was purely a sign of love and respect. Jesus makes it clear to Peter, who seems always to say the wrong thing at the right time, that if he refuses Jesus' gesture, he will have no part in the Kingdom of God. It is at this point that our Lord clearly makes us to understand that the "Lord and Master" is the "servant of servants." He goes on to command that we, as he, assume the role of servant to the servants of God. *For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.*

Not everyone present understood. Interestingly, he also uses the Maundy to speak of those who betray him as unclean and in dire need of washing. Obviously, he knew who would betray him. The betrayer, himself, knew. However, it is clear from the accounts in scripture that they were the only ones who knew. Some even asked "*is it I, Lord?*"

Many who wish to take on the role of *servant*, or more so, *servant of the servants*, are like the rich ruler who sought the Kingdom of God and wished to become a follower of Christ. The price is too high. The commitment required too much. The discipline of humility exacts too high a demand. We are reminded of this by our Lord's words "*many are called, but few are chosen.*"

Sadly, the betrayer did not simply betray the Son of God. He betrayed his closest friends, those he had traveled with and lived with for three years. Most sad is that he betrayed himself and had such remorse that he took his own life. The fact that we use the word *Judas* today as a common reference to those who betray, confirms that they are always among us—many in *sheep's clothing*.

When we talk about being servant of servants, perhaps our mind takes us to Jesus' words about *shepherds and hirelings*. What does he say about good shepherds and hirelings? The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hireling, when he sees the wolf coming, flees and leaves the sheep to take care of themselves as best they

can. Shepherds care more for the sheep than they do for their own life. Hirelings care more for themselves than they do for anything else.

Tonight, we will strip the Altar. This is an ancient service that represents the stripping of Jesus and the placing of the *crown of thorns* on his head and the purple *cloak* draped over him. We are reminded that they cast lots for his garments. We are reminded that he hung in the deepest humiliation upon the cross for any who would pass by, to spit on him and ridicule him. He asked that, if possible, the cup might be passed from him. Nevertheless, He took upon himself all the humiliation and sin that belongs to all of us. He laid down his life for his sheep. He made a way forward for us.

What does it mean to live in his image? What does it mean to be Christ like? What is expected of the family of God, the faithful, that are His visible body on earth?

It means that we will be betrayed by those who present themselves as *shepherds* but turn out to be nothing more than *hirelings*. It means that we will be left by them to fend for ourselves when the wolf comes to our door. It means that we will be stripped and beaten and crucified as He was. This family of God has, and is, experiencing what it is to be a faithful follower of the Servant of servants, to walk in his footsteps. You have been betrayed by some who presented themselves to you as *shepherds* but were no more than *hirelings*. Much of what you have gained is being stripped away. You are the target of ridicule and humiliation, some of it centered on the very Eucharist itself.

The good news is found in the words, *behold, I make all things new*. If we understand that God ushers in a new creation by the initiation of *chaos*, that His divine activity begins with dismantling what was as a way of making room for what will be, we can take hope. We can realize that we stand with the disciples on this evening, sensing something ominous but not understanding. We can be as those who constantly wanted to return to the bondage of Egypt, or, we can live on the manna from heaven and be guided by a great cloud in our journey to the holy city, the Promised Land.

While *chaos* does signal the end of what was, and has been, we must know in our hearts that *chaos is not the end* for the faithful followers of Christ. It signals the new beginning.

Had the disciples not clearly understood this, they would never have emerged as the good shepherds they were. They, and countless other martyrs, would never have joyfully laid down their lives, many imitating the death of their Lord. They would never have clearly understood the promise of being resurrected people. They would have lived the entirety of their lives in fear instead of victory.

Tonight, we witness anew the *chaos* of God as the beginning of his new creation. This is my body, which is given for you, take eat. This is my blood, which is shed for you. Feed upon Him in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

Let us pray.

Teach us, good Lord, to serve thee as thou deservest; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labor and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do thy will; through Christ our Lord.
(a prayer of Ignatius Loyola)

Amen.

Good Friday
St. Mary's Church, Denver, Colorado
March 21, 2008

“The King of the Jews”

An homily by the Rt. Rev'd D. Presley Hutchens

And they took Jesus and led him away. And he bearing his cross went forth into a place called the place of the skull, which is called in Hebrew Golgotha: where they crucified him, and two other men with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst. And Pilate wrote a title, and put in on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS. This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city; and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews. Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

Let us pray.

The Almighty Lord, who is a most strong tower to all those who put their trust in him, to whom all things in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, do bow and obey; Be now and ever more thy defence; and make thee know and feel, that there is none other Name under heaven given to man, in whom, and through whom, thou mayest receive health and salvation, but only the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I remind those of us who were here last evening that the foundation of these four homilies is an understanding that *chaos* is the sign of the beginning of God's divine activity. Old wine skins will not hold new wine.

We gather tonight in this holy place and cannot but notice that it has changed. The Altar is bare, the tabernacle empty. We have gathered on the blackest day in all of history. The only and true Son of God has been put to death by an angry mob. He has been nailed to a tree naked and bleeding. He was given vinegar to drink when he asked for water. As he hung there between two thieves as the sun beat down upon them, he spoke to his mother, her sister, the disciple John, Mary Magdalene, and finally to his beloved Father in heaven. His words continue to haunt us. *My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?* His final utterance *it is finished* brings his life and ministry on this earth to its painful end.

Was this not what he came to earth in human flesh to do? Was not this the ransom required to redeem us from a world turned wicked? Could we have paid the ransom? Could we have been redeemed by any other means? Could our world have become so evil that our very Creator God could no longer reach across to us and redeem us from it by anything short of the bloody death of his only Son? Does it not seem strange to you that those who sought his death and denied his divinity were the Chief Priests who served God in the holiest place known to us? They even asked Pilate to change the sign he had placed above Jesus' head on the cross. They wanted added the words *He said he was.*

Ironically, as he had said just a day or two earlier, the temple would be destroyed some seventy years later and has remained so these two thousand years, while he was resurrected in three days and lives today in the hearts of all who call him Lord.

What is all this telling us? Why is this story so compelling to us? The Apostle Paul tells us *but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.* And again in the Letter to the Hebrews, *he taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will, we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.* It is compelling because at some level we understand that we are sinners facing death and judgment with no hope other than the blood of Christ.

If nothing else is clear, it is clear that centuries of worship in the holiest building on earth did little, or nothing, to atone for the evil and sin in which God's chosen found themselves. It is very clear that superficial religion and proud hearts is an abomination to God. In deed, it was that attitude that ultimately led to the destruction of the Temple. What he requires is a broken and contrite heart. What he desires is that his laws be written in the hearts and minds of those whom he has created in his own image.

Many of us today find ourselves in a very similar place. Our liturgy somehow suffices for any real need to know him who the liturgy lifts up and worships. Our buildings give some a false sense that we have done something special for God. If we are in the presence of God in this place, and I believe we are, what difference does it make in our lives? If we know the liturgy by heart, does it change who we are and what we are about? To truly follow Christ, is to recognize him in the faces of the weak and poor, the sick and those in prison. It is to know that we shall suffer with him so that we may be glorified with him. Paul reminds us that we ought to glory in our sufferings when we suffer for Christ's sake, and, the Gospels remind us that *when we have done it for the least of these, we have done it unto Christ.*

Most often, we suffer mightily when we genuinely commit ourselves to walk in his way, to do his will, to feed his sheep, to raise the fallen, to minister to the homeless and orphans, and preach the gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world. Just as the old saying goes, "no good deed goes unpunished", neither will the world reward us for this. In fact, often those closest to us will thwart our efforts or scoff at our strange ideas.

In church, phrases like *what are those people doing here?* or *he (or they) don't know anything about the Mass*, is another way of echoing the sentiments of the High Priests of Jesus' day. He did not die a bloody death to save the *frozen few* or anyone's building. He gave his life to ransom you from eternal death to an eternity in the real presence of God. He even used the occasion of his death to redeem the souls in hell. That is how much he loves each of us. It is not about how we do church, or where we do church, but *why* we do church. Have you thought about why you do church?

Much of what has gone on here before is dying in front of our eyes. Perhaps, we have the same sense of loss that those who stood at the foot of the cross must have felt. But we, like they, may not know that from this terrible event will emerge the final solution—the redemption of the world, the reconciliation of man and God, the assurance that death is not the end but the beginning of an eternity with him. What a terrible tragedy when we choose anything less. The one thing we may know for sure, as a faithful follower of Christ, is that crucifixion is followed by resurrection. Death is swallowed up in victory. Let me speak to our immediate situation for a moment. We here are in a life or death struggle for the catholic faith. It has little, or nothing, to do with liturgical expression or finances. It is about broken and contrite hearts. It is about prayerfully seeking God's will and finding the courage and strength to do it. It is knowing ultimately that this place, and this family, is now, has always been, and will forever be, in the hands of God.

He knows your suffering, he understands the concern of your hearts, he feels your losses with you and grieves for the trials you face. He also promises never to leave you comfortless.

I want to close with the words of the Apostle Paul to the Romans. *What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?*

Thanks be to God.

*Easter Even
St. Mary's Church,
Denver Colorado*

“The Pascal Lamb”

*An Homily by the Rt. Rev'd D. Presley Hutchens
March 22, 2008*

Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, saying, Sir, we remember that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way; make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulcher sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

I remind us again tonight of the foundation of these homilies. It is through *chaos* that God, in his divine activity, makes all things new.

Let us pray.

O GOD, merciful Father, who despisest not the sighing of a contrite heart, nor the desire of such as are sorrowful; Mercifully assist our prayers which we make before thee in all our troubles and adversities, whensoever they oppress us; and graciously hear us, that those evils which the craft and subtlety of the devil or man worketh against us, may, by thy good providence, be brought to naught; that we thy servants, being hurt by no persecutions, may evermore give thanks unto thee in thy holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Massey Shepherd tells us that the use of the word *Easter* stems from the pagan festival celebrated by Anglo-Saxons honoring their goddess of Spring *Eostre*. However, *Pascha* was the ancient Church's word for our season of *Easter*. It is a Greek word stemming from the Hebrew word *pesakh*, meaning *Passover*. Hence the *Pascal Lamb* was a perfect lamb, without spot or blemish, which was specially chosen for sacrifice in the Temple at the feast of the Passover. The sacrifice of this innocent and unblemished lamb would atone for the sins and offenses committed by Israel during the previous year. As I have said earlier, this sacrifice no longer atoned. In fact, Passover had become in some sense a commercial venture much like the commerce of the moneychangers.

All of the retailers of this country take a substantial interest in the commercial aspect of the two major Christian holy days, Christmas and Easter. However, there is some difference between their commercialization in the sheer interest of profit, and the holy and sacred work of the High Priest and Chief Priests seeking repentance and

reconciliation with God in the name of the people. Nowhere is the difference more clearly shown than the unrivaled prominence of the Easter Bunny.

Even though I cannot shed much light on the Easter bunny, we certainly understand the egg as one of the very ancient resurrection symbols of the early Church. The image of the chick emerging from its shell is a very beautiful picture of resurrection from the tomb.

In the passages of scripture appointed for the last several days, we have begun to see the Chief Priests of the Temple as men who were so concerned with the status quo that they missed the most important event in world history—its redemption once for all. Our God has decisively stepped on to the world's stage to change a corrupt order—replacing it with sure and certain reconciliation and redemption.

The perfect Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, has now become the only possible *Paschal Victim*, who, as the hymn says, *opens wide the gates of heaven* for us.

It is now Holy Saturday and Jesus has given up the ghost and is dead. His cold, lifeless body, from which water and blood had flowed before his death, has been given to Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrin and a disciple of Jesus. By custom, leaving naked and dead crucified bodies hanging in public was a defilement of the Jewish Sabbath. Just before the beginning of Sabbath, Joseph received the body and placed it in a tomb. It has been generally said that it was Joseph's own tomb in which Christ lifeless body was placed.

At this point, according to I Peter 3:17-22, Jesus *descends into hell* where he does his redemptive work for those *disobedient spirits* who have died without the benefit of his teaching. It is their last chance.

Luke tells us that Joseph had not consented to the Sanhedrin's sentence of Jesus. The other evangelists tell us that he was a man of great piety who worked for justice and longed for the coming of the Kingdom of God. Although John is mentioned as standing at the foot of the cross as, also, is Peter's denial of Jesus, sadly, Jesus' closest disciples are not mentioned during this portion of the narratives. It is generally understood that they fled. Joseph of Arimathea is the only one to care for the broken and bruised body of our Savior.

In the midst of all this, again come the Chief Priests and Pharisees to Pilate. This time they ask that he make sure that Jesus remains locked in his tomb. They reinforce their request with the implication of the political consequences if Jesus' body is stolen by the disciples and the people think he has really come back to life. No pun intended, but they really left no stone unturned in their efforts to deny his divinity.

Each of the Gospels records a different account of what happened. Nevertheless, we know that those who went to the tomb on Sunday found it empty, and some saw him face to face, some not recognizing him until later.

What is all this telling us? What can we really know from these accounts?

We can know that the early Christians and Jewish followers of Christ knew that he was risen from the dead, they believed he was who he said he was and trusted what he had told them. Many willingly gave up their life for him.

Obviously, this has not been enough for many modern men and women. *Why?* They have not known him personally as their Lord and Savior. Perhaps they would like to believe, but can't. Perhaps they are modern day Chief Priests and Pharisees who wish to take every precaution to lock him and this story away for good.

We live in a society today in which many genuinely would like this story to go away. They find faithful and committed Christians a threat to the "freedom" they have fought to build into *their* society. Coming face to face with faithful and committed Christians confronts them with the reality that they have sold themselves into bondage rather than brought about an enlightened and free society. Rather than lifting the society to a higher level, they have simply tried to give societal permission to indulge in every form of debauchery and evil. They are the modern counterparts to the infamous serpent recorded in the second creation narrative in the Book of Genesis. They, like the Chief Priests and Pharisees, accuse the Christ of being the deceiver. They are betting their very soul and eternity that the scriptural accounts and the teachings of the Apostles are lies, and, that Jesus was the biggest fraud in history. There is one major difference between them and those *disobedient spirits* to whom Jesus ministered during his descent into Hell. They shall have no second chance. Not even purgatory.

All that leads me to say that neither they, nor anyone else, could have stopped Jesus' resurrection. No tomb could ever have held him. An hardened and unrepentant heart is the only barrier to his redemptive sacrifice. If he brought a general and collective salvation, as some theologians may think, there would be no need for broken and contrite hearts, or the Church's sacramental life. If he died so that we could have permission to engage in all sorts of debauchery, neither his life, nor the life of anyone else, would make sense, a difference, or be worthwhile. *He came that we might have life and have it abundantly.* In what context could this possibly make sense otherwise?

Churches are full of people who want to avoid the reality of confronting the Paschal Lamb. They want to avoid, at any cost, any conviction and genuine commitment to Jesus Christ and his Kingdom. They lock him away at every point and set a watch. They call him a deceiver. They go to great lengths to bolster their apostasy, most often trying to conceal it in complicated "theological" arguments or "noble" political causes. Hence, we have their affirmation that Jesus' death demands nothing, requires nothing, and really means nothing. Simply put, I might sum up their agenda, "If it feels good, do it. No one will be happier than Jesus." They, like we, will face the final judgment. Unlike the faithful in Christ, they have no hope for eternity in the presence of God.

Should there be some in this parish who want to keep Jesus in a box. The reality is they cannot. Thank God for those like Joseph of Arimathea, who are unconcerned with the prevailing political winds and follow the Christ. Thank God for those who, like Peter and the rest, fled in fear, but rose from the ashes of despair, to receive the gifts of the

Holy Ghost some fifty days later, and firmly to plant the Kingdom of God in the hearts and minds of men and women.

Tonight, amidst the ancient symbolism of this holy eve, he is still present and speaking. He is offering anyone here, who does not know him as Redeemer, the very opportunity to know him in that way.

Now therefore we sacrifice our Passover, wherein for us the very Lamb of God is slain, by whose Blood even the doors of his faithful people are made holy. For wherefore should man be born into this world, save that being born he might be redeemed? O how wonderful is thy loving kindness unto us thy children! O how unspeakable is the love that thou has bestowed on us: who to redeem a servant, delivered up thine only Son! O how great is thy providence in man's necessity, to make the Blood of Christ from Adam's sin our salvation! O blessed iniquity, for whose redemption such a price was paid by such a Savior.

Amen.

The Sunday of the Resurrection, commonly called Easter
St. Mary's Church,
Denver, Colorado

“The Risen Lord”

An Homily by the Rt. Rev'd D. Presley Hutchens
March 23, 2008

They came to the sepulcher at the rising of the Sun. And they said among themselves, Who shall roll for us away the stone from the door of the sepulcher? And when they looked, they saw that the stone was rolled away: for it was very great. And entering into the sepulcher, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment: and they were affrighted. And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him, as he said unto you.

From the darkness and death of the world, God has by his divine activity brought all things to the light. He has separated the darkness of evil from the light of the perfect good. There is now a new Adam. Death has been overcome by the Christian hope of the Resurrection. A completely new order has been born through *chaos* and the old is no more. *Behold, I make all things new!*

Let us pray.

To our prayers, O Lord, we join our unfeigned thanks for all thy mercies; for our being, our reason, and all other endowments and faculties of soul and body; for our health, friends, food, and raiment, and all the other comforts and conveniences of life. Above all, we adore thy mercy in sending thy only Son into the world, to redeem us from sin and eternal death, and in giving us the knowledge and sense of our duty towards thee. We bless thee for thy patience with us, notwithstanding our many and great provocations; for all the directions, assistances, and comforts of thy Holy Spirit; for thy continual care and watchful providence over us through the whole course of our lives; and particularly for the mercies and benefits of the past days; beseeching thee to continue these thy blessings to us, and give us grace to show our thankfulness in a sincere obedience to his laws, through whose merits and intercession we received them all, thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

There are many accounts in the New Testament of the Resurrection of Jesus. Each narrative is somewhat different from the other accounts. This is not news to those who are familiar with the scriptures, or have followed the many readings the last several days of Holy Week. Unbelievers have generally cited these differences, as a way of showing that there really is little to place one's trust in. Some theologians have struggled over the years to harmonize or explain the variance. The Church, in its ancient wisdom, has chosen to let them lay side by side, each with its own integrity.

The crux of the matter is simple. Either you believe in the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ or you don't. The notion that believers are somehow less facilitated mentally than non-believers has been around from the beginning. In fact, modern theologians who do not accept literal accounts of the bodily resurrection have resorted to all sorts of theological remedies that might possibly keep the narratives intact but forgo any assertion of the bodily resurrection. We are reminded of the account of the visitation of the Holy Ghost on the feast of Pentecost. Many said the Apostles were drunk, even at ten o'clock in the morning. The faithful in Christ know exactly what happened. The faithful in Christ are not lower level intellects, drunks or fools. They possess a knowledge that reaches beyond the confines of this world.

A more complicated question is, "What do we mean by the word *believe*?" Are there varying degrees of belief? Can we believe in the accounts and involve ourselves in the ancient and, perhaps, mysterious liturgies of Holy Week, and not believe Jesus was the only Son of God? Can we believe that he was the Son of God, and see no relationship or relevance in our lives? Is it possible to be *grandchildren or great grandchildren* of God, rather than *children*? Simply put, can we believe all this and not experience the revelation that we are redeemed by his body and blood?

Sadly, it would seem that many fall into varying degrees of "belief" that change little in their lives. Their seeming belief is not reflected in their words or deeds. They are not particularly bad people; they are just not resurrected people. They do not carry in their hearts the sure and certain knowledge that death is not the end, that the full promise of God is theirs. Obviously, all faithful Christians experience episodes of doubt in their spiritual journey. The relevant question is, of course, do these episodes comprise the majority of your spiritual walk? Do you live by your doubts about the divinity of Christ as the agent of redemption, or do you live with an abiding joy and peace that passes understanding? The other obvious question is, "*why doesn't everyone truly believe?*"

Some of the obvious answers may be, *hardness of heart, anger, resentment, hatred, unconcern, life situations, past history, the evil one or his angels are deceivers, and so on*. I believe the reason is that they have not met the Risen Lord face to face. They have not had the eyes to see him around and about them. They have not had the ears to hear his voice when he has spoken to them. They have not felt an urgency to know him in all his fullness.

The Apostle Paul is our benchmark here. He would have qualified for all of the above reasons. However, his Damascus Road experience changed his life. He saw the Risen Lord and heard his voice. We know he saw him since he was counted among the Apostles, and this was part of the definition of Christ's disciples.

Unfortunately, his experience has given rise to the notion that, unless we have had a Damascus Road experience, we cannot be sure we have been redeemed. Of the many followers, converts and disciples touched by the life of Jesus, Paul almost singularly remains alone in his experience. The vast majority represent the experience of the fishermen, who simply looked into his eyes, listened to his voice, laid down their nets and

followed him. Yes, they had doubts. Yes, they struggled, but ultimately they found their life of little personal worth when compared to the glories encountered by them in their walk with the Christ.

However, Paul's experience is certainly worth noting. The current circumstances in which we find ourselves in life, may well prepare us for the visitation of the Holy Ghost. Again, *chaos* in our personal, family or professional life may open our mind and heart to a possible visitation by the Holy Ghost. This visitation enables us to meet the Risen Lord, to hear his voice, to know and to love him. However, we must be ready. We must make our heart and mind open to the possibility of knowing him in his fullness and following him.

It is true that seldom since the first century have we had the opportunity to walk and talk with him, as did his early followers. But the Gospel is clear. We continue to have every opportunity to walk and talk with him, to see him and know his will for our lives. Too many of us "believe" as Saint Thomas did, *seeing is believing*. As you may remember, he would not believe until he felt the nail scars in the Master's hands and felt the scar left by the spear in his side. St. John gives the account. Thomas was confronted by the Risen Lord. Jesus admonished him that he *be not faithless, but believing*. St. Thomas *answered and said unto him, MY LORD AND MY GOD*.

The Risen Lord is calling you and me from the comfort of our dark tombs into the light of day just as he called Lazarus from his tomb. He is the Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety and nine and seeks the one that is lost. When he has found the lost one, he places it on his shoulders and restores it to the flock—the family of God. Just as the Risen Lord seeks each of us, we must seek him. We must be able to give up the misguided notion that we can depend on ourselves, or someone else, other than on the Risen Lord for the fullness of life. We have to be willing to leave our life behind to have life in him. The scripture tells us that if we search for him with all our heart, we will surely find him. Samuel tells us, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (II Samuel 7:14)

The Risen Christ, the Lord is here in our midst, reaching his nail scarred hands toward us. He reaches out to us. He is speaking comfortable words to us. Can we see him? Can we hear him? He is really and always present in the bread and wine. As you take him into your body, take him into your heart as well.

To be sure, the Risen Lord is found in the Blessed Sacrament. However, he is found in every corner of life as well. He may be found in the good times and bad, in the homes of the rich and poor, among the well and the infirm. He should be found everywhere we go. He should be seen in us. We should serve as his hands, voice, eyes and heart. They should know they have seen the Risen Lord in us. You shall be called blessed, and, with the Risen Lord, the *Servant of servants*. Take with you the sure and certain knowledge that *Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again*.

Let us pray.

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may, through thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Now may the God of Peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good, that you may do his will, that he may work in you that which is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ: to whom be glory for ever and ever.

And the blessings of God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son and the Holy Ghost the Comforter be with you now and forevermore.

Amen.