

The Feast for the Resurrection of Our Lord

1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Christ is arisen. He is arisen indeed. And then the celebration seems to be over and done with for today; it is an awfully negative tone we hear in the Word of God today, is it not, of the First Letter of the holy Apostle Paul to the Corinthians: *Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump. So much for celebrating.*

Admittedly, the Apostle also does encourage his readers to celebrate: *Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed, he says. Let us therefore celebrate the festival!* So he does throw a bone to those who would like to celebrate and be joyful. But even this encouragement to celebrate comes with quite a caveat, does it not, and more than a mere caveat, really; in fact, it seems that this encouragement to celebrate serves primarily to underscore and enforce the point the Apostle has already made, does it not, that we should be careful not to be too joyful today, not to celebrate too much: *Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, he writes, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*

It is often said that beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Less often is it said, although it obviously is equally accurate, that *ugliness* is in the eye of the beholder as well. Our experience of what we see, and what we hear, usually it is in large part a product of our own preconceived perceptions, what we expect to see or hear, and, perhaps more importantly, what we *want* to see or hear, and are *willing* to see and hear.

There are those who have no desire to hear of sin, or of the obedience they owe to God; to them, if a preacher ever makes any mention whatsoever of any of this in his preaching and teaching, it will seem that he never speaks about anything else; at least they will say that about him, if they know those words, that his preaching is all *Law*, and there is no *Gospel* in it, no matter how much and how strongly he *also* preaches that which really is *the Gospel*: that full forgiveness for all sin is given to all sinners, freely and for nothing, and eternal life with God, out of His goodness and mercy alone and for no other reason, all on account of what He Himself has done for sinners in the holy innocent life of His beloved Son, and His bitter sufferings and death, and by virtue of His glorious resurrection.

But worship is supposed to be *joyful*, is it not? Particularly today. Christ is arisen, and arisen indeed. So why do we have to hear about boasting that is not good, and that the leaven of malice and evil needs to be cleansed out?

Well, if that is all we hear today, because we *also* hear it, there might be something wrong with our hearing.

More importantly, though, there is joy, and then there is joy. There is the pleasure of fun and games and irresponsibility, and there is the treasure of the Truth; there is worldly wealth and health and happiness, and there is forgiveness of sin and eternal life; there is that which makes you *feel* good; and then there is *real* good.

Christ is arisen. He is arisen indeed. And this is real, and real good, and the greatest good. And it is this real good the Apostle urges his readers to celebrate; because it is what God wishes for all sinners to celebrate; for God wishes for all sinners to be saved.

Christ is arisen. He is arisen indeed. And this is salvation for sinners such as ourselves, and eternal life. The Son of God has suffered for the sin of all sinners. He who is God Himself from eternity, who shall come in glory to judge the living and the dead, He has Himself borne the judgement of His own goodness against all evil, His own righteous wrath against sin. He has had Himself born into our kind, and baptised with us sinners, to make Himself one with us and take us upon Himself, and all that is ours, our sins and shortcomings, our evil and impurity, our ungodliness and unbelief, and bear it for us, and His own judgement against it, the fullness of death and destruction and devastation.

And now He is arisen, and arisen indeed. For with His sufferings and death, who is Himself God from eternity, and the Holy One of God, in whom there is no sin, no evil, no impurity, the price and penalty has been paid for the sin of all sinners, in full and in abundance, and so there was no need for Him to remain in death, who died for the sin of the world, nor for any whom He will call His own and claim as His own. And He claims us sinners as His own with *the Gospel*, His Word of His love and what His love has done for us, the price He has paid to ransom and redeem us for Himself, for His Kingdom and His eternal life. He has sinners baptised into Himself and all that is His, His righteousness, that is: His goodness and innocence before God, and His heavenly Kingdom, and His eternal life. And all this is for real, and He calls us to rejoice in it for real, and acknowledge it as real. Therefore is it that the Apostle writes as we hear it today that he does.

As He was baptised into us and made one with us in all that is ours, for real, to suffer for us, for real, so we have been baptised into Him and all that is His, for real, in order that we might live with Him, for ever, and for real. And He gives Himself to us, for real, with His body and blood, in unleavened bread and in wine, in His festive meal of salvation, so that we are one body with Him, and one body in Him, in His Church, for real.

There were those in Corinth who did not acknowledge this as reality; those who did not *discern the body*, as the Apostle writes it elsewhere in the Letter. They did not acknowledge that the Church of Christ is really the body of Christ, that what is taught there is *the Truth*, that what happens there is for real, and really makes Christians one with Him. Some would engage in other religion on the side, they would listen to preachers and teachers who taught differently, and feel superior for knowing that there is more to reality than what the Church taught, and what the simpletons in Church knew. And so they would make up their own religion, of which what was taught in the Church of Christ was but one element among many. Others would in their daily life, or *real life*, if you will, and they would, follow the ways of the world and live in outright ungodliness; for one should not be narrow-minded. And they also would feel superior to the less sophisticated simpletons, who actually believed what the Church taught. It was against this the Apostle wrote that *your boasting is not good!* Later in the Letter he writes: *Flee from idolatry*, that is: from all other religion. For *you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons*. Again, *a little leaven leavens the whole lump*. When those engaging in ungodliness and idolatry commune at the table of the Lord, they involve the entire Church in their ungodliness and idolatry. And when the Church, in an attempt to be sophisticated and modern, embraces ungodliness and idolatry and admits those engaging in idolatry and other ungodliness to the altar of the Lord, she brings ungodliness and idolatry upon herself. And ungodliness and idolatry are poison to the faith, and make those once Christian to lose sight of the faith and be lost again to God and His salvation.

And there it is again, this negative tone, is it not? Well, we can choose to hear that. Or we can take to heart the point the Apostle actually makes in what we hear today, that *Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed!* He has been slaughtered as the Lamb of God to bear the sin of the world, for real, and take it away from us sinners.

And He has us feast on Himself in His festive meal of salvation, so as to save us from death and the judgement of God and deliver us from exile and slavery to live with Him instead in His heavenly Kingdom, as those who ate of the first Passover lamb were saved from death and judgement in Egypt and delivered from exile and slavery to live instead with God in the Promised Land.

In the unleavened bread and the wine of the festival He gives His own body and blood to us, given and shed for our salvation, and His salvation itself, whole and complete as it is, free from all leaven of evil and ungodliness. He gives Himself to us and makes us one with Himself, so that all that is His is ours, and all that He is, and we are cleansed from all evil and ungodliness before His judgement, and we shall not perish and die forever in His wrath, but rather be with Him forever, for real, in the fullness of His goodness and His glory.

For those who have ears to hear, this is a joyful Word of salvation: *Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed!* And Christ is arisen! He is arisen indeed. For with His sufferings and death the price has been paid in full for all our sins and shortcomings. And risen from death He is in glory with God, and gives His salvation to us, for real, full and complete as it is, in the festival, that is: the celebration of His salvation.

Let us celebrate the festival, writes the Apostle, not with the old leaven the leaven of malice and evil, but rather with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. His salvation is worth celebrating for what it really is. *Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed!* And His salvation is worth not mixing the faith with the worldly leaven of ungodliness and idolatry; it is worth seeking over that which might make us *feel good*, but is not *real good*.

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, writes the Apostle, as you really are unleavened. Christ has already made us unleavened, free from all impurity. And He still does that, in the festival, that is: in the celebration of His salvation, which is the worship of His faithful Church. In the celebration of His salvation He continues to give us, out of His own abundance, that which He has already given to us once and for all, fully and for real. He makes us to be, again, and to remain, what He has already made us to be. And He will, constantly, such is His promise, until He comes in glory to take us to Himself forever in the fullness of His heavenly life. So let us celebrate the festival. Christ is arisen. He is arisen indeed.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. *Amen.*