

EASTER SUNDAY: RESURRECTION OF THE LORD B/2006

Today is a day of victory, a day of the acquittal of the condemned and the crucified Christ, a day of the triumph of life over death, where God the Father has confirmed and recognized, before the whole world and the crowd of those who condemned Jesus, that he is God and the Lord of the universe; death cannot prevail over him. All the readings of this Easter Sunday convey this vital message of God's victory in his messenger and beloved Jesus Christ.

To better understand the significance of the feast we are celebrating today, we have to bear in mind the shock, the frustration and the disappointment the disciples have had, when Jesus was apprehended and put to death, how they all ran away. They went scared and hiding for fear of the Jews. That now they stand before the whole people and speak openly, means that something has happened to them, which has changed their fear into courage, their despair into hope and their anguish into joy: Christ is risen from the dead!

This is the content of the discourse of Peter in the Acts of Apostles. At the outset, Peter reminds the crowd who Jesus was, a real man endowed with the Holy Spirit, who went throughout their country and in the surrounding regions doing good and healing the sick, and how he was unjustly put to death. But, God could not leave his beloved in the tomb forever; he has raised him to life again. In him all the prophecy has been fulfilled. Whoever believes in him receives forgiveness of sins in his name.

The mission of the disciples, then, is that of bearing witness to what God has done in Jesus Christ by raising him from the dead. This assertion shows clearly that the resurrection of Jesus does not belong to the realm of proof, but that of testimony. The Gospel of this Sunday states it in such a way that leaves no doubt that the risen Christ should be approached not in searching the proof of his resurrection, but by believing in him.

The Gospel says: "The other disciple also went in, the one who arrived first, and he saw and believed". What did John see? Nothing else than an open and empty tomb materialized by the burial cloths. In fact, on Easter Sunday, there is nothing to see; there is only one thing to do, namely to believe that no grave has the power to prevent God's life to spring out and to reach us. On Easter morning only faith can make us understand that there is no impassable gap between God and death, that the risen Christ leads us from death to life, making us new creatures pleasing to his Father.

What is the true meaning of resurrection? Christ's resurrection means that the grave is no more a place where death is closed up behind a rolled stone. The stone of death has been removed forever from the tomb. The risen Christ has destroyed forever the reign of death symbolized by the place of burial. He has promoted life and consecrated all those who believe in him to eternal life and to rejoice with him in his kingdom. For us human beings, Christ's resurrection means that our own physical death is not an obstacle to the flourishing of God's life in us. Like Christ, when we die God gives us life anew, as we believe in him

and are baptized in him, and Christ himself makes us participate in his own resurrection.

It is only in faith that we can attest to Christ's resurrection. Faith whose question here is not an intellectual knowledge about Jesus or a moral engagement about the doctrines of the Church, but it is, first of all, a personal commitment to dedicate our life to Christ and to live accordingly. That is why the resurrection of Christ is challenging us to believe in him without seeing him. As 1 Peter, 1, 8-9 says: "You love him, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him. So you rejoice with a great and glorious joy that words cannot express, because you are receiving the salvation, which is the purpose of your faith in him".

The risen and living Christ is the reason of our faith. If he did not rise, there would never be faith in him. The problem, however, is that there is nothing to see, except his word to listen to and to believe. Like the disciples on the morning of the resurrection, we are confused, because we do not see him, but only the empty tomb. And yet, he is there present; Christ is alive in our midst. Like the disciples who believed in the words of Mary of Magdala, so should we believe in the word of the Gospel that Christ is risen. This can happen only if we open ourselves to the grace of the Holy Spirit who is able to strengthen the presence of Christ in our hearts and in our community. It is the Holy Spirit who gives the courage to proclaim Christ to the world and to bear witness to the world. Without seeing we believe, because he is in our midst in many ways.

To celebrate the resurrection of Jesus is to celebrate with anticipation our own victory over death, because in him we have been re-born and called to new life. As St Paul said in the 2nd reading, "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory". That is why Christians should be more concerned about things of above than those of the earth. Not that Christians should not take interest in the things of this world. On the contrary, since they work and carry out their task like everybody else; Christians, however, should be convinced that the fullness of life cannot be achieved here on earth.

Since Christ is risen we are called to life and not to death. So is made clear our mission: being alive and spread life around us. Because Christ is the Lord of life, may we learn anew that we are set free from the power of death and sin! Because of the risen Christ, may we stand against the culture of death and defend life by any means. I wish to each one of you a blessed feast of Easter!



Homily Date: April 16, 2006
© 2006 – Father Felicien Ilunga Mbala
Contact: www.mbala.org
Document Name: 20060416homily.pdf