

Easter 3

O Lord Christ, as Thou didst at this season rise from death into the wondrous power of an endless life, so may we by Thy most gracious help rise from the darkness of sin into the ineffable splendour of conscious life in Thee, O Light of Light, who livest and reignest for evermore. Amen.

What a remarkable prayer: we are asking the Risen Christ for grace to assist us in our spiritual evolution, our theosis, to help us to ‘rise from the darkness of sin into the ineffable splendour of conscious life’ in Him whom we call the Light of the World. And isn’t that what sin is, really, darkness? But not just natural darkness, but a kind of willful darkness, a palpable unconsciousness, a failure to come into the Light, a failure to become enlightened. Each of us knows only too well what is keeping him or her from uttering this prayer fervently. How much do we truly want to be enlightened? How much would we prefer to remain in darkness, whether it be the darkness of habit, the darkness of security, the darkness of an over-inflated sense of self, the darkness of our day-to-day routine that keeps us from realizing the truth of our life in Christ?

St. Paul is explicit in this morning’s epistle: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him; rooted and built up in Him, stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.” As he was so often doing, Paul was writing a church in trouble, a church that had begun well but which was for whatever reason falling short—some were sliding back into a rigorous legalism, some were inching towards Gnosticism, some were allowing the cares of the world to erode their fledgling faith. They were then as we are now: becoming more comfortable with the darkness, slipping into unconsciousness.

In this letter to the Colossians, Paul gives some of his most mystical insight. Of Christ he says, “For in Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are complete in Him, who is the Head of all principality and power; buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead.” Translation: In Christ is the fullness of God and we, as baptized members of Christ, are ourselves participants in that divinity. When it was the custom of the church to baptize by full immersion, the image of burial was more potent; and you’ve heard me say it before that I wish we would revise our rite to recapture some of that symbolism. The idea was one buried his or her old self, dying with Christ, so that one could rise with a new self, participating in the new life, the Risen Life of Christ.

Paul continues: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” Or, in keeping with our collect for the day, if we are to call ourselves Christians, then we ought to seek a higher life, a more *conscious* life in Christ. Whatever is keeping us from this life requires our immediate attention; it requires our *conscious* analysis so that we may wake up and

stop wasting our precious time wallowing in darkness. Indeed, if we be ‘risen with Christ,’ why don’t we act like it?

Again, St. Paul: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth; for ye are dead to earth, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” This is an amazing statement. We have died with Christ, we live because of Christ, and here’s the sacred mystery--our ‘life is hid with Christ in God.’ I take this to mean that we live most consciously when we *know* ‘our life is hid with Christ in God’; not our natural life, which is subject to decay, but our spiritual life, the only real life that we have. When we ‘set our affection on the things above’—compassion, selfless love, magnanimity, the power and fecundity of the present moment--rather than on the ego-driven drivel we mistake for life—our petty pains and grievances, self love alternating with self loathing, and the constant hankering after the past or lusting for the future, *then* we are closer to the conscious life, to the fullness of life which is paradoxically *hidden* with Christ in God.

If I had to explain to someone what this church is about, this is what I would say: we exist in order to recognize the truth of Paul’s saying “Your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Our life is not about maintaining the status quo; it is not about rescuing people from a burning fire stoked by an angry God; it is not about measuring success as the world measures success; it is about waking up, finding that Christ is alive in us, and knowing that, to live as though it were so.

And now to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost, Three Persons in one God, be ascribed as is most justly due, all honour, might, majesty, power and dominion, now, henceforth and forevermore. Amen.

Msgr. Tony Howard
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