

## Mass of Easter Day April 12, 2009

Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

### Continue to Celebrate

*“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.”* Today is a day for rejoicing. It is a day of transition from the Lenten season to the Easter season; from darkness to light. We look back on the liturgies of the last three days and give thanks and praise to God for all He has done for us.

Because of Adam’s sin, mankind had been deprived of the opportunity to enter heaven. But God, because of His love for us, sent His only Son to die for us to atone for our sins. Jesus willingly offered Himself up on the cross, and by doing so conquered death and opened the gates to heaven. And Jesus left His body in the tomb and went down to the dead, to all those good souls who had died since the time of Adam, and led them home. And then Jesus was reunited with His glorified body and rose from the dead. And that, of course, is what we celebrate today.

Jesus’ death and resurrection are the great source of hope for us as Christians. Now we can go to heaven when we die; now we have the hope of receiving our resurrected bodies on the last day.

Jesus was always God, but at His incarnation, when He was conceived in Mary’s womb, He also became true man; He became one of us. Jesus is true man, and we can look at his humanity as consisting of three stages.

The first stage began when He was conceived and born. He walked this earth with a human soul and a mortal body just as we do every day. And as much as we are joyous as we celebrate Christmas because Jesus came into the world, our hopes for eternity were not changed by the events we celebrated that day. Christmas is a time of joy only because it anticipates the events of Good Friday and Easter. If Jesus had continued to walk this earth for the last 2000 years, instead of dying on the cross, we would still not have access to heaven.

And so Jesus, the perfect man, willingly died for us and was placed in the tomb. He entered a second stage of His humanity; His human soul was separated from His mortal body. And this is what happens to us at death. Our souls will be separated from our bodies. But because of Jesus’ great act of love, our souls can enter into heaven while our bodies lie in the earth. In the three days in the tomb, Jesus’ humanity was much like ours will be when we die and are bodies are placed in our graves. But like Jesus, because of Jesus, our souls are free to enter heaven.

But the biggest reason for our celebration today is the third stage of Jesus’ humanity. Jesus is reunited with His glorified human body, and this gives us the great hope that at the last day we will be reunited with our glorified bodies. When Jesus was resurrected He was still true man; His body was truly a human body. We heard in the first reading this morning: *“This man God raised on the third day and granted that he be visible, not to all the people, but to us, the witnesses chosen by God in advance, who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.”* Jesus ate and drank with His disciples as proof of His humanity; proof that He had a human body and was not just a spirit.

Jesus conquered death by rising again to new life and offers us the promise of rising from the dead again. It is a mystery that even the apostles who followed Jesus for three years struggled to comprehend. We hear in the gospel that Peter and John raced to the empty tomb and finally believed. The gospel states: ***“For they did not yet understand the Scripture that he had to rise from the dead.”*** It is a wonderful mystery of love and hope, and it is the reason that this day is the greatest of all celebrations. The Church refers to Easter Sunday as the Mother of All Sundays. Without the events we celebrate today, we would not gather on Sundays to worship.

And we celebrate this entire next week as if it was all one Sunday, and we celebrate the Easter season for the next seven weeks until the feast of Pentecost. We spent 6 ½ weeks of Lent preparing for this day, trying to draw closer to God, trying to better understand our need for a savior and redeemer. But now it is time to transition to a new time of celebration. Do not just celebrate for this one day.

At the beginning of Lent everyone made plans and commitments of special acts of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving that they would perform for 40 days to prepare themselves for this day. And today I ask you to consider how you will celebrate for the next 50 days. There are only 40 days of Lent, but 50 days to celebrate Easter. Can you continue your extra prayer time with the Lord, but maybe with a little different focus? Can you attend daily mass more often as opportunities to give thanks and praise to God who has done so much for us; who has done so much for you? Can you continue random acts of joy and love toward your neighbors, not out of sacrifice, but out of love.

The Easter season is a great time to celebrate; do not let it go to waste; do not let it only be for one day. Good Friday was a solemn and important day, but we do not want to get stuck there; it was one day. But we should celebrate Easter every day of our lives.

May God bless all of you and your families and have a wonderful, and *long*, Easter celebration.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**