

# Easter — Perpetual Springtime

Paschal joy for a person of Faith is not limited to an annual celebration of Easter on one day of the year. The empty tomb for the Christian means joy not for a day or a season but forever. The liturgies of earlier days were lacking in an expressed appreciation of Easter permanence, for we were allowed to utter our alleluias only in T.P. (tempore Paschali) which extended from Easter Sunday to the end of an Easter Season which terminated with Trinity Sunday.



The words of joy ring out now even in the rites accompanying the burial of our loved ones. The Requiems of old which focused on our sadness at the temporary loss of a loved one, now call our attention to a liturgy of the Resurrection — and a celebration that reminds us that the Risen Christ has destroyed the victory of all the seemingly hopeless situations of life. Even death has been swallowed up in the Easter triumph.

A spiritual writer has summed up the perpetual Springtime of Easter in these words: "If we walk away from the light which is Christ (the light of Easter morn) the shadows of the evils of life lengthen before us and we become victims of our fears and anxieties. As we walk toward the light which is Christ, the shadows fall behind us. When we are directly under the light, the shadows disappear."

In an Easter message written a few years ago, Cardinal Suenens of Belgium recalls an American film, "The World in Darkness", which depicted this scene:

"An archaeologist was excavating in

Jerusalem, mainly in the Calvary area. One day, he announced that he had found the tomb where Jesus was laid, the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and — the tomb was not empty. He declared that he had found a mummified corpse in it, and put it on exhibition. People came in crowds to see this corpse. Christ had not, therefore, risen from the dead. The news was carried by press and radio to the four corners of the earth. Immediately the world was plunged into indescribable gloom. Everything which spoke of Christ, everything which lived by Him, everything which bore His mark or a trace of His memory was doomed to disappear. The churches were closed, the cathedrals demolished; the pictures which portrayed Him disappeared from the galleries, monasteries emptied; missionaries returned home; the cross was torn down in people's homes.

Finally, when the world, shattered by this immense seismic shock, was plunged into complete spiritual darkness, the archaeologist confessed on his deathbed that he had told a lie and the tomb had been empty."

Whatever the value of the film, it had this merit: it made it clear that nothing is more essential to the world than a decisive answer to the question of what really happened on Easter morn. For, otherwise, life for us remains filled with this litany of questions that haunted the first disciples: Have we lived in vain or not? Have we wasted our lives or not? Has our dedication to Him been a mere adventure with no future, or not?

St. Paul made it clear that everything depended on the reality of an empty tomb. In 1976 the Church gives voice once more to the cry which has echoed down the ages: "Brethren, Christ has risen from the dead." All her joy is Easter joy. After 1900 years of history, she rejoices in certain victory over those who slander and enslave or betray her: her only

vengeance is to pray for her accusers and her victory to survive them:

There are only two possible answers to the empty tomb. The first: On the third day after His fatal crucifixion, Jesus of Nazareth rose living from the dead, as He had predicted. The second: On that third day, or, more exactly, during the night of Saturday-Sunday, the yokel partisans of Christ, in a burst of ingenious daring for which nothing in the Gospels has prepared us, somehow foxed the hardbitten Roman sentries, broke open the tomb, removed the body of their late Master, secretly reburied it, and then circulated the myth — no, the coldblooded lie! — of a resurrection.

If a man embraces and endorses the first of these explanations of the empty tomb, he will readily conclude that God the Father has indeed authenticated the calm claims of Jesus to be more than human, to be literally and uniquely God's Son — in short, to be divine. Such a believer is, in the most ancient and exact sense, a Christian. He has free access to Christian Paschal joy, and to a kind of permanent joy, because he also believes that as Christ lived triumphantly after death, so will he.

If a man embraces and endorses the second explanation of the gaping grave, it does not immediately follow just what he is, religiously, except that he is not, in the ancient and exact sense, a Christian. This stout fellow will naturally have no traffic with any particular rejoicing connected with a resurrection that did not come off. As for what ensues after death, he will have to make up his own mind, because apart from the resurrection of Christ, there is no guidance in this rather important matter.

Thank God for our faith which unites us to the Risen Christ. Let us keep shouting for all to hear: "We are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song."

## The Necessity of Redemption

Pope Paul VI delivered the following address at his general audience of April 7:

We are preparing to celebrate the Passover; Christ's Passover and our Passover (1 Cor 5, 7). The Passover has its great symbolism in the liberation of the chosen people from the slavery into which they had fallen while living in Egypt. And it means the passing of the Lord, who saves from ruin those who are sprinkled with the blood of the ritual lamb. The symbolism of the Old Testament becomes a reality, though still expressed in sacramental signs, in the New Testament. The Christian Passover, Easter, involves two fundamental elements; the human one, ours; and it is the state of necessity in which we find ourselves, which calls for salvation; the divine one, which, if accepted by us, is bestowed upon us by sovereign grace, and it is the redemption effected by Christ through his death and resurrection.

Let us fix our attention for a moment on the first element, the human condition, as we were saying, in which we find ourselves. It is the radical, universal need, impossible for our strength alone, to be torn away from the unhappy and fatal destiny of human existence: "it would have been of no use to us to have been born", the Deacon sings prophetically on Holy Saturday night, before the dawn of Easter day, "if it had not been granted to us to be born again in redemption."

Now what is the modern outlook with regard to this necessity of salvation, of real life which, in the end, like that of Christ, is victorious over

death? Does it recognize it, or does it contest it? Here there arises one of the main reflections of modern psychology: does man need to be saved?

If mankind recognizes this necessity, it is at the gate of salvation. We could say, simplifying every existential question for the moment, that nothing else is required but faithfulness to the salvation obtained. From this awareness arises the discovery of our truth, of our dramatic situation. We are beings condemned to fail in the fateful experiment of our life in time, if we are not granted that supplement of life itself, which we call salvation, and which cannot come to us except from a planned intervention, a marvellous "economy" on the divine side.

Now we see how so many men today do not wish to admit this fundamental reality. The great hereditary misfortune, from which our very nature, the whole of mankind, suffers original sin, which has put us in a position of disavowal in regard to the God of goodness, and has deserved for us, the name of "filii irae", deserving of divine wrath (Eph 2, 3; St Augustine, Enarr. in Ps 37, 5; P.L. 36, 398), is not easily accepted by the secular mind today, although we must say, with Paschal, that the whole condition of man depends on this imperceptible point (Pensees, 445). Today human thought alternates between desperate and criminal despair or false and proud optimism (cf. Rousseau), resolved in any case to refuse the limitless and distressing need of transcendent salvation.

On the contrary, we will be humble and sincere; we will recognize the complex and urgent accumulation of our many deficiencies, of our unsatisfied needs, of our chronic infirmities, first among all that which is personally involuntary, but naturally transmitted to us by the moral and functional disorder derived from



Pope Paul, holding an olive branch instead of the traditional palm fronds, speaks to a congregation of some 20,000 during Palm Sunday Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. The pontiff urged young people to continue to acclaim Jesus as "Savior and Lord," and not to follow the path of "force . . . and oppressive revolution."

Adam's sin; and we will find a solution and comfort and a remedy for this unfortunate situation in Christ's Redemption (cf. C. Journet, L'Eglise, III, 293 ff).

It is not possible to celebrate Easter in any other way than by setting out from this awareness of the need that a Saviour should come to our aid; and we will understand something of this tragic sacrifice, if we compare it with our otherwise desperate condition of life.

With our Apostolic Blessing.