

EASTER – 2017

I. When I was about 14 years old, I was the president of the Methodist Youth Fellowship in our local church.

A. And I remember when one Easter I obtained permission from the Pastor to make a replica of Christ's tomb up by the altar, complete with an imitation rock that could be rolled away just as the scriptures declared Christ's resurrection.

B. It was dramatic, and we kids were excited, and yet through the years since, I have come to see that in a significant way our efforts were backwards.

C. We were not alone in doing this, for many Christians think that during Holy Week we are supposed to imagine ourselves back into the past, where these events once happened long ago.

1. But this is backwards, for as Christians we can't live simply on memories -- for these have value only if somehow those past events are somehow happening now, in the present, and we are actual participants.

2. It is not that we are to go back then, but the "back then" needs to become a "here and now."

II. In a real sense I became a Catholic because I came to see that the Catholic Church knows how to make this happen – in the Liturgy of the Mass.

B. To understand this, it is important for us to recognize that almost every time that the Risen Christ appears, it happens when persons are eating bread and drinking wine, just as the disciples had done on the eve of the crucifixion.

C. Sometimes this resurrection experience happened in the actual upper room, at other times it was a breakfast by a lake side, but most revealing of all was when it occurred at an inn in the town of Emmaus.

D. It was there that the disciples first came to understand that the experience of the risen Christ happens in the breaking of bread.

III. No wonder, then, that from then on, Christians have declared Sundays to be Resurrection Day, gathering not primarily to remember a story of what happened long ago, but so that the Easter event could happen again and again in the breaking of bread.

A. What happens in the Mass is more than a symbolic remembrance -- for in a way beyond our understanding, the resurrected Christ himself occurs as Real Presence.

B. A beautiful portrayal for grasping this appears in the book of Revelation: "Behold I stand at the door and knock, Christ says, and if one opens the door, I shall come in, and eat with him and he with me." Beautiful.

IV. And so In the first part of the Mass, called the Introductory Rites, we prepare ourselves to hear the knock, being forgiven so that our soul is dressed for the occasion.

A. The Second Part of the drama of the Mass, is the Liturgy of the Word, and here we learn more about who this Guest might be, pray above all that he will come, to us and the whole world.

B. The third part of the Mass occurs when we stand around the altar, participating in the Eucharistic Prayer, and then it is that the Door is opened, the Stone is rolled away, and our resurrected God enters

1. Yes, he is truly Emmanuel, "God with us."

- C. Yet the disciples had a hard time recognizing him, for the Risen Christ still bears all the marks of crucifixion -- the marks in his hands and feet, a hole in this side, a crown of thorns on his head, and spit still on his face.
 - D. Christ wasn't crucified just once, then raised as if Golgotha never occurred.
 - E. The place of the skull discloses that our God wills to be our Suffering God continually, crucified by our violence, our betrayals, our wars, our selfishness -- these are the nails that out of love Christ continues to bear for us -- in forgiveness.
- IV. And it is this very Christ who now invites us to Holy Communion -- as if with vintage wine and fresh baked bread, we dine with him and he with us.
- A. The altar has become a table, and the one who invites us to join him in table fellowship is experienced as our Divine Friend.
 - 1. Beyond all imagination, we experience a unity with the One who suffers with us, for us, by us, and in us -- sharing the agony of life's tragedies, famines, sicknesses, and death.
 - B. The Real Presence becomes known in the profound intimacy of table fellowship -- in an Easter intimacy of friends for life, and beyond
- V. Then comes the finale of mass -- here Pentecost occurs, when the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ himself, promises as a Blessing to go out with us into the world as a Eucharistic presence, preparing people everywhere to hear the Divine Knocking.
- A. My friends, Easter is occurring -- now, in this very place. .