

Christ, the Risen Lord of Mercy

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Christianity is based on the primary experience of Easter. So it is worthwhile to think and meditate about the fundamental truth of Christian faith, namely, Jesus' Resurrection. New Testament faith is *a priori* eschatological and depends on the Easter *kerygma*, the Resurrection of Jesus. This has been rightly pointed out by Jürgen Moltmann: "Christianity stands or falls with the reality of the raising of Jesus from the dead by God."¹ Faith in the Resurrection is also faith in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Therefore, "Faith in the God 'who raised Christ from the dead' and the confession that 'Jesus Christ is the Lord are mutually interpretative.'"² Nevertheless the death and resurrection of Christ constitute one single action, which resumes in itself the entire life of Christ. And the stories of the resurrection, in fact, acquire credibility and reliability after the recognition of the truth of Christ's crucifixion, not before. Therefore, the heart of Christian faith is in the incarnate and crucified Son of God raised from the dead by the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 6:14).

This Christ event in its totality, that culminates precisely in his death and resurrection is not an ordinary event in human history but rather is the result of the absolutely free intervention of God as God in history. Therefore, their consequences, though they happened at one point in time, last-

ed throughout history and do not exhaust themselves. For instance, the Scriptural accounts tell us that the disciples fled (Mk. 14:50) and thought that the cause of Jesus was lost after his Crucifixion (Lk. 24:19-21). But “something happened” to the disciples after the Resurrection. The experience of the risen Christ captivated them in self-grounding truth because it carried along in it and with it the ground of their reality and a truth that is not just the result of humanity’s activity in its own history. This certainty of truth comes from the risen Jesus himself showing himself to his disciples. And the disciples understood Jesus’ Resurrection as the realization of the righteousness of God, and therefore, entrusted their future into God’s hands. Because of this certainty, disciples “cannot but” confess and commit themselves to what they have seen and heard and what now finds expression in the Christian *kerygma*. Against this self-grounding reality Paul writes to the young Church at Corinth: “if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain” (1. Cor. 15:14).

The Paschal Mystery manifests God’s mercy that meets human misery. The risen Lord shows us the mercy of the Father (cf. Lk. 6:36). The Mystery of the Resurrection is a mystery of Divine Love: God out of his love for this world sent his only Son to save this world (Jn. 3:16). But Jesus’ Crucifixion was a criminal act which humans carried out against God’s will. Humans tried to thwart God’s plan to save the world, but the Resurrection shows that God did not allow them to destroy his plan to save the world. More particularly, the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead re-orders the outward appearance of ordinary human historical events. The Resurrection reveals that evil and injustice do not have the last word. Ultimately, God wins over evil and

God's love prevails over hatred and reveals that death is not the end. Furthermore, the Resurrection of Jesus is a reinterpretation of the meaning of life, because our God is a God of life and love, and this love is the merciful love of God.

And this merciful love is the heroic act of *amor benevolentiae* that we see on the cross of Jesus. He does not condemn his opponents but forgives and prays for them from the cross (cf. Lk. 23:34). This is God's loving activity of loving-in-spite-of human persons' acts to thwart God's plan to save them. Furthermore, the Post Resurrection appearances of Jesus also prove this merciful love, i.e., although the disciples were unfaithful and left Jesus after his arrest, Jesus remains faithful. In spite of their infidelity, the risen Lord gathers them again and gives them a new perspective on life and new spiritual power.

This truth is very explicitly explained in the image of Divine Mercy, in representations of the crucified and risen Christ. In the image of Divine Mercy, we see the rays of blood and water flowing from the veiled pierced heart of Jesus, and the wounds on his hands and feet giving witness to the events of Good Friday. But the image also depicts Jesus forgiving sinners and giving them his love. Thus this image portrays the Mercy of the risen Lord, despite his Good Friday experience. This is the resurrection faith of the New Testament: *Jesus has risen, Jesus is the Lord of mercy, Hallelujah*. According to Pope Francis, the Joy of God is to forgive the repentant sinner. According to the Pope, the three parables from Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke depict this Joy. These concern "the lost sheep; the lost coin; and the parable of the Prodigal Son"; they are typical of Luke. While the parables of both the lost sheep and the lost coin narrate the determination of God the Father to find 'the lost,' the parable of the Prodigal Son catches the

enduring salvific love of the merciful father who rejoices in the return of his son more dramatically. God is the loving Father who goes after 'the lost' in need of Mercy and, more importantly, God rejoices when he finds them back.

Therefore, the Easter season is a time to be touched by God's Divine Love: "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever!" (Ps. 118:1). At the same time, God dares us to practice compassion for others. God's greatness is not found primarily in his mighty works but rather in his *kenosis* on the cross. Christ's self-emptying that culminated on the cross may be foolishness to the world (cf. Phil. 2: 7-8; 1. Cor. 1:23), but Christ exhibits the true love of God on the cross: to love and forgive humanity even when it wants to destroy him. cross exhibits the paradox of God's revelation, i.e., He has given signs of supernatural and given the testimony of the truth of God. He has made some extraordinary signs; he has healed the sick and he gave life to the dead. But Christ's death on the cross shows that he shared all human indigence to the end and never contradicted or suppressed the human freedom, i.e., "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him (Mat. 27. 42). Jesus identified himself with human beings in their experience of sinfulness, a forlorn situation of insecurity, thus offering them God's gift of love, the only real security for human persons. Against this background Jürgen Moltmann writes that:

What has already happened to Christ is representative of what happens to everybody: it is happening *pars pro toto*. Consequently, he has suffered vicariously what threatens everyone. But if he has suffered vicariously what threatens everyone, then

through his representation he liberates everyone from this threat, and throws open to them the future of the new creation.³

The cross is the *kenosis* of Christ. Its self-emptying constitutes a remarkable moment of meaning for human beings. Therefore, Christ's true act of *kenosis* had been a great force of Christianity as such, because, acts of true love spring from acts of humility. Therefore, Jesus could say at the washing the feet of his disciples, "For I have set you an example...love one another. Just as I have loved you..." (Jn.13:15, 34). God's mercy is a virtue worth emulating for us humans, because his act of love on the cross has somehow conquered the principalities and powers of this world, which culminates in resurrection. This is the symbolic expression of the cross and remains a symbol of our identity. Apparently, it's not just about not doing evil alone but also about doing good. This has been rightly explained by the Spanish philosopher, Xavier Zubiri, when he writes:

When Christ wished the common people to understand him more simply, he tells us, while talking about mercy, that in the next world when he judges us, he will say? For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink? And they will ask him? Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?? And he will tell them? As long as you did it to each one of my least brethren next to you, you did it to me.? (Mt 25:35-40). The very action of mercy by Christ is the same action by men. Reciprocally, the action of men, insofar as Christians, is identical to the very life of Christ.⁴

In every age people are weak and need kindness. God gives us the time "to be merciful as your Father is merciful" (Lk. 6:36). The basic human response to God's offer of love (cf. 1 Jn. 4:9-19; Jn. 3:16) is not the return of love to God

alone but also love for one's fellow human beings (cf. Mt. 19:16-19).

Our God is a God of life and love, of joy and goodness. This is the faith of the New Testament: Jesus Christ has risen; and he is the Lord of mercy.

Notes

- 1 J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London 2002) 152.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 213.
- 3 J. Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ. Christology in Messianic Dimension* (London 1990) 155.
- 4 X. Zubiri, *Christianity*, 350 (Accessed from <http://www.catholicphilosophy.com/sys-tmpl/chapter4340351/index.html> on February 2, 2016)

“Nothing glows brighter than the heart awakened to the light of love that lives within it.” —Guy Finley

“There will come a time when you believe everything is finished. That will be the beginning.” —Louis L’Amour

“Life is really simple, but men insist on making it complicated.” —Confucius

“Only through love can we obtain communion with God.” —Albert Schweitzer

“The soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears.” —Native American proverb