

The Glory of the Truth of Jesus

I had the chance to hold a medium-sized male Golden Eagle on my glove once. I had to use a special “eagle glove” that reached up to my elbow because of his size. His head was tall enough to look me in the eye, and in his eyes there was absolutely no fear. eagles know that if push came to shove they could take you on. On the other hand, they are not without limits. 70% of them will not make it through their first winter, they will starve to death, be killed by another predator, get injured or fall ill. They are especially susceptible to pollutants in the environment. As a falconry bird they still need daily feeding, protection from danger, veterinarian care—all the things that any normal falconry bird requires. There is a mystique about eagles that holds them apart, but when you get them up close they are just big hawks, vulnerable in many ways.

In today's Gospel lesson from Luke 24 Jesus appears to the disciples in the upper room. At first they think He is a ghost. He asks for food and they give him fish and he eats it. (This is definitive proof that He is not a ghost, the spirits of the dead were not thought capable of eating solid food.) He teaches them that the Scriptures spoke of what has just happened. He commissions them as witnesses of these things. At first it sounds like a repeat of what we read last week, indeed it is Luke's account of the same event. But this account contrasts with John in significant ways. The emphasis is on the reality of the resurrection, not the giving of the Holy Spirit. Luke is showing us what the resurrected Jesus is like, powerful and heavenly, wholly other than earthly, but also totally present to us, perhaps even more than before the crucifixion.

Now we have a lot of ideas about resurrection. A friend recently told me he had died in the hospital of a heart attack, but they had brought him back. I asked him if he saw the white light that so many people report. Indeed, he had. Had he seen anyone else? No, but it sure was peaceful. Many who have undergone that experience report a reticence at coming back—back to the struggles of earthly living, and the slow deterioration of these bodies. We sometimes think of resurrection as merely a return to this life. Obviously, Jesus' resurrection was more than that. After the resurrection a locked door was no longer any barrier to Him. On the other hand, shows like "Ghost Hunters" gives us the image of life after death as ethereal and immaterial, depleted of earth's joys, diminished in our capacity to relate to important people and events. Obviously Jesus' wasn't limited to that. He enjoyed a piece of broiled fish with His friends. He spoke with them, taught them, touched them, fellowshiped with them.

Resurrection is transformation: It is not resuscitation, a restoration of earthly life to a body that has lost it, any more than redemption is merely restoring innocence. Neither is it merely the idea that Jesus' memory lives in the hearts of His followers, any more than heaven is only a way to encourage good behavior. Resurrection involves a spiritual body. Like our bodies now, it can eat, take up space, show the effects of injuries, etc., but it is also capable of appearing where it needs to be without bothering with doors! It is fit for heaven as well as earth. Like an eagle in falconry, that is like any other bird, yet so much more, resurrection encompasses all the former and much, much more. Resurrection goes to the heart of our Christian life. Paul wrote in Philippians 3:10-11,

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead."

Jesus was resurrected in a way we cannot be. When we lived in the jungle of eastern Ecuador there were trails that could take you days and days through the jungle from one village to another. Some of these trails had existed for decades, but somebody had to blaze them the first time. Jesus was the trail-blazer through death to resurrection for us. On the other hand, Jesus was also resurrected in a way we hope to be. Just as Jesus died and was resurrected, so we, too, will someday lay down our lives in the hope of the resurrection. Hebrews 12 talks

about the saints who have gone before who witness our earthly race from the bleachers of heaven, we will join them some day.

But the miracle starts now, not at death. It is part and parcel with the life of the baptized Christian. Take a look at our baptismal rite and see how many times it comes up:

- 1.P. 302 three renunciations (death) and 3 acceptances (resurrection.)
- 2.P. 306, Final prayer for the Candidates: “Grant, O Lord, that all who are baptized into the death of Jesus Christ your Son may live in the power of his resurrection and look for him to come again in glory; who lives and reigns now and forever.”
- 3.P. 306, Thanksgiving over the water:
 - a. “In it your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection, from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.”
 - b. “We thank you, Father, for the water of Baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection. Through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.”
- 4.P. 307: Blessing of the Water, last line: “may continue forever in the risen life of Jesus Christ our Savior.”
- 5.P. 308, Prayer of thanksgiving: “We thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servants the forgiveness of sin, and have raised them to the new life of grace.”

We die to the life of sin, and are raised to the new life of grace, over and over and over again as we learn to live out our baptisms.

Today we baptize. We claim for these people the life of Jesus—the power to live that resurrection life here on earth, and the hope of living it fully in heaven, and we pledge ourselves to lead them down the path that we ourselves walk through death to resurrection.