

WITNESSES TO THE RESURRECTION

As we learn in the Acts of the Apostles, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to His Disciples for 40 days after His Resurrection, encouraging them and entrusting them with the care of His Holy Church (see Acts 1:3). This is why the Resurrection is celebrated for 40 days, with this Sunday being the last of this Paschal season.

As we know, the Resurrection of Christ is the greatest historical event that the Church celebrates, on every Sunday throughout the whole year. The Resurrection of the Lord is significant not only because of the blessings associated with the Feast, but also because it reinforces a profound truth: the divinity of Jesus Christ. As St. Paul the Apostle says: “*if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty [without meaning] and so your faith is empty*” (1 Corinthians 15:14). In short, without the Resurrection of Christ (which manifests His divinity), the Holy Church of Christ has no foundation, and will fall.

The enemies of the Church, from the beginning until now, know all of this. This is why they strive to convince people that the Resurrection is a lie. By extension, they also sow disbelief in God Himself, either directly or indirectly. The first opponents of the Resurrection of Christ were the rulers of the Jewish people. When the soldiers guarding the Tomb of Lord returned to the Jewish chief priests in fear, reporting all that had happened, they (the Jewish leadership) “*gave a large sum of money to the soldiers, saying, ‘Tell them [the people], ‘His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept’*” (Matthew 28:11-13). Does such a story have any credibility? The Disciples were in hiding, scattered and terrified. And the Tomb was secured by the Roman guard, known for their supreme discipline. Yet, this is what the Jews were saying in order to undermine any faith in the divinity of Christ. It was also that way during the previous three years of the Lord's public ministry. This can be seen in today's Gospel lesson, after Jesus healed the man who was blind from birth. The Jewish leadership was pressing the former blind man to admit that Jesus was a sinner! The man's response silenced their attacks: “*Whether He is a sinner or not I do not know. One thing I know: that though I was blind, now I see ...Do you also want to become His disciples?*” (John 9:24-27).

The hostility against the Resurrection of the Lord continues to this day, as the spiritual descendants of the Pharisees continue their assaults with various ideologies and heresies. A prominent example in our time can be seen in the group that calls themselves “Jehovah's Witnesses,” among others who come and go over time. There are also staunch opponents of our Lord Jesus Christ who are supported and guided by powerful international interests. They use every form of media (print, film and the internet) in order to defame and ridicule holy people who were witnesses to the Resurrection, and they even target the God-man Jesus Himself.

But no matter how much these adversaries engage in their frenzied attacks against the Risen Christ, they are unable to accomplish their goals. St. Paul the Apostle heard this voice when he was still known as Saul, the persecutor of Christians: “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads*” (Acts 26:14). How many others heard a similar voice over the centuries, and went from enemies of the Resurrection to preachers of the Resurrection? What happened to these enemies of Christ? They disappeared, or otherwise left a deplorable memory of their actions.

My brothers and sisters, the joyous message of the Angel to the entire world in front of the Tomb of Christ, that Jesus “*is risen from the dead*” (Matthew 28:7), is proclaimed by countless Christians throughout the centuries and to the ends of the universe. We do the same, wherever we find ourselves. Let us also, “*as sons of God and sons of the resurrection*” (Luke 20:36), never stop declaring the truth of His Resurrection, in which Christ has lifted us from the earth up to Heaven. He brought us out of the darkness of Hades, and into the eternal light of His kingdom, with never ending bliss and jubilation. May we experience this first in our own lives, with the Resurrection making our souls rejoice and faces bright, as it was with St. Seraphim of Sarov, who would greet everyone with the words: “**Christ is Risen, my joy!**”

“**Christ is Risen**” is the most joyous announcement for humanity. If we can feel those words in the depth of our hearts, and radiate this joy of Christ’s Resurrection, then we can see the whole world with different eyes. Problems will be cast in a new light, and the petty things that often disturb our life will lose significance. The light of the Resurrection will dispel the darkness of our lives. With the Resurrection, “*everything has been filled with light*” (Paschal Canon, 3rd Ode). The joy of the Risen Lord will be filling our hearts, “*For Christ is risen, an eternal delight*” (1st Ode).

Here then, my dear brothers and sisters, is a wonderful mission: That we ourselves be filled with the joy of the Resurrection, and in doing so, bringing to those around us the great message of the Resurrection: **Christ is Risen!**

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