

The Resurrection – What does it Mean?

Introduction

1 Corinthians 15:12-14

¹²But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

But why is this so? What does this all mean?

There are two resurrections here we need to distinguish from the outset –

- The resurrection of God made Man – Jesus
- The eventual resurrection of the Dead

These two events are integrally connected and yet separate and distinct.

This evening I will just deal with mainly the former:

- The resurrection of God made Man - Jesus

Before we continue, just to be clear, I am working from a position of faith that Jesus was indeed the long awaited Messiah proclaimed by the Old Testament Hebrew Prophets.

The Early Christian Understanding of Jesus' Resurrection

Pre-Jesus' Resurrection

Jesus made numerous explicit references during his ministry, to his eventual death and resurrection.

See for example:

Mark 8:31-33; 9:30-32; and 10:32-34.

Matthew 12:39-40

John 2:19-22

Mark 8:31-33

³¹ *He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.*

³² *He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.*

³³ *But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. Get behind me, Satan! he said. You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.*

Mark 9:30-32

³⁰ *They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were,³¹ because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.*

³² *But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.*

Mark 10:32-34

³² *They were on their way up to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to him.*

³³ *We are going up to Jerusalem, he said, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles,³⁴ who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.*

Post-Jesus' Resurrection

After his resurrection the body of Jesus was transformed in some way. The Apostles and Evangelists had difficulty in describing his resurrected state. This is because it was something out of the ordinary - it was extraordinary. His body was no longer in a natural state, rather a supernatural one:

- Mark describes it as Jesus appearing “...in another form” - **Mark 16:12**
- He could pass through walls / doors - **John 20:19 + 26**
- He could vanish - **Luke 24:31**
- Luke says in two places that a large number of disciples saw Jesus bodily alive and then ascend from their midst into Heaven - **Luke 24:50-53 and Acts 1:6-12**

However, Jesus was clearly not a ghost of any kind even though they initially thought he was:

Luke 24:36-38

³⁶ *While they were still talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, Peace be with you.*

³⁷ *They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost.*

³⁸ *He said to them, Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds?*

- Jesus invites the Apostles to touch him “...for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have” - **Luke 24:39**
- Thomas is invited by Jesus put his hand into his wounded side - **John 20:27**
- Jesus prepares and / or eats food - **John 21:9-13 and Luke 24:41-43**

Peter, James, and John may have experienced something similar during the Transfiguration event.

See:

Mark 9:2-8

Matthew 17:1-8

² *There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.*

Luke 9:28-36

Is this a glimpse of our future resurrected state? We don't know.

From the New Testament writings it would appear that the Apostles of Jesus were not expecting Jesus to rise from the dead, even though, as we have seen, Jesus told them this would happen numerous times.

Jesus found them in fear behind locked doors - **John 20:19**

When they are told that Jesus is not to be found in the tomb, they disbelieve the messengers, and like Thomas, have to see it for themselves, running full pelt down to the empty tomb:

See:

Luke 24:1-12

John 16:9-11

Even after this event the two disciples on the road to Emmaus took a whole day to recognise Jesus – **Luke 24:13-35**

Jesus even told off the Apostles for their: “...*lack of faith and stubbornness, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen*” - **Mark 16:14**

They were “*startled and terrified*” when Jesus appeared - **Luke 24:37**

If these stories were made up is it not probable the Disciples would have represented themselves better?

So, after an initial amount of incredulity, disbelief, and hesitancy, the disciples of Jesus became absolutely certain in their conviction that Jesus – God made Man – rose from the dead.

They met a large amount of incomprehension, opposition, and no doubt scorn and mockery when they proclaimed this as an historical fact:

Act 17:32

When St. Paul was in Athens we are told: *“When they [the crowd] heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed”,* however, *“...other said, “We will hear you again about this””,* and some *“...became believers”*.

1 Corinthians 15:12

“Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?”

Many of the Apostles gave their lives proclaiming their belief the resurrected Jesus. This fact was the central point of their teaching.

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

“For I handed onto you as of first importance what I had in turn received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures...”

We do not give away our lives lightly, and it is very unlikely the Apostles and Disciples would have done so if the resurrection had been staged and fabricated.

Did Jesus have to Die and Rise Again?

Let us start trying to answer these questions by exploring the facts.

The First Sin

In the beginning God created Man “...in his image, in the image of God he created them: male and female he created them” - **Genesis 1:27**

As part of our creation we were given free will. With free will we were able to choose between good and evil.

As a side note Angels, who are also created (extra-terrestrial) beings also have free will.

At a point in time sadly, Man chose to do an act that was not good, what we call a sin. However, the persons who undertook this first act of sinfulness - in Genesis they are known as Eve and Adam - could never have known the cataclysmic consequences of it. This act is termed the “Original Sin”.

What we know is that the “Original Sin” caused a huge rift, a wide chasm, to open up between God and Man on many different levels.

The total and complete unity between God and Man, and Man and Nature, that had previously existed, was significantly damaged.

One of the many consequences of this act was death. So, from now on, Man would die. With him separated from God in life, it would make sense he would remain separated from him in death.

After death our immortal soul (which is infused in us at the moment of conception) separates from our mortal bodies.

But post the first sin, and prior to the arrival of Jesus, where did these souls now go? We do not know. But with a gulf existing between God and Man, they were not able to attain eternal happiness, namely being perfectly at rest in the presence of God, what we term Heaven.

The Incarnation

In order to heal this rift with Man, God came to earth as a man in the person of Jesus and suffered death on a cross. Could he have healed this rift in a different way? Of course he could, but he decided in his Divine wisdom to do it this way.

So it was that by dying and rising again on the 3rd day the rift between God and Man was eventually healed.

So why did God choose to heal the rift in this way? We do not know. How was the rift healed by these events? Again we do not fully know. They can only be matters of theological conjecture and speculation. All we can say is, it was.

By his life and teaching Jesus showed us how we can fully live our lives in the likeness and image of God, and thereby attain Eternal Life after the death of our mortal bodies.

By his death and resurrection he bridged and closed the ancient rift between God and Man, so enabling us to enter Heaven at the end of our mortal lives. What a day it must have been, when what must have been billions of souls, were at last able to enter Heaven.

Matthew 27:52-53

⁵²The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. ⁵³They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

In 360AD St Athanasius said: "God became human so that humans could become more like God." (On the Incarnation 54:3, PG 25:192B)

A favorite metaphor of Eastern Catholicism is that Jesus Christ restores in us the divine image that was tarnished by Original Sin, enabling people to live into their divine potential.

Paul offers a whole collage of images for the "changed utterly" that God had brought about in the dying and rising of Jesus. He wrote of it as *salvation* (Rom 1:16), *liberation* (Gal 5:1), *justification* (Gal 2:16-21), *reconciliation* (2 Cor 3:16-18), *sanctification* (1 Cor 1:30), *forgiveness* (Rom 3:25), *expiation* (Rom 3:25), *ransom* (Gal 4:5), *new creation* (Gal 6:15), *new life* (1 Cor 15:45), *divine adoption* (Gal 4:4-6) - and the list could go on.

Why so many metaphors? Paul was trying to express for the first Christian communities what is inexhaustible and cannot be fully described - the utter change that is ensured by Easter.

This selfless act of Jesus is known as “substitutionary atonement”. In essence Jesus died - intentionally and willingly - on the Cross, as a substitute for sinners. This doctrine presents Jesus' death as a supreme act of love for mankind, and a heroic act to save people from hell, as expressed in **John 3:16**: *"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son."* It stresses the vicarious nature of the crucifixion being "instead of us".

The Method

The method of Jesus' death was not unusual for the time and place in which he lived. Crucifixion was the main method of execution by the ruling Roman authorities. As an example, the army of the slave Spartacus was put to death by the Roman General Crassus in the same way in about c. 70BC. About 6,600 of Spartacus's followers were crucified along the via Appia (or the Appian Way) from Brundisium to Rome.

Crucifixion was certainly a cruel and horrific form of execution. However, what form of execution is not cruel and horrific?

To me what is even more horrific is the way the crowd turned on Jesus. It was this act that sealed Jesus' fate.

The contrast between Palm Sunday and Good Friday is extreme, but not unbelievable. A priest friend of mine quotes how fickle football crowds can be. At the beginning of the game you are the hero at the end you are the villain.

Consider the act of lynching. Seemingly balanced and peace loving individuals are collectively driven along as a group, village, tribe, race, region, or even a whole nation to undertake acts of extreme barbarity. In recent times we have the philosophy of Nazism, the Balkan Wars, Rwanda, and just last month Kenya. These acts are the most profound manifestations of that which Jesus came to defeat, namely Evil.

The Present

Today the bridge is still there and will be until the end of time.

However, we are still fatally flawed due to the sin of Adam. Original Sin is something all humans since this time have been stained with. The Catechism explains how important Baptism is in this regard:

VI. THE NECESSITY OF BAPTISM

1257 The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation.[59] He also commands his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to all nations and to baptize them.[60] Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament.[61] The Church does not know of any means other than Baptism that assures entry into eternal beatitude; this is why she takes care not to neglect the mission she has received from the Lord to see that all who can be baptized are "reborn of water and the Spirit." God has bound salvation to the sacrament of Baptism, but he himself is not bound by his sacraments.

1258 The Church has always held the firm conviction that those who suffer death for the sake of the faith without having received Baptism are baptized by their death for and with Christ. This Baptism of blood, like the desire for Baptism, brings about the fruits of Baptism without being a sacrament.

1259 For catechumens who die before their Baptism, their explicit desire to receive it, together with repentance for their sins, and charity, assures them the salvation that they were not able to receive through the sacrament.

1260 "Since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partakers, in a way known to God, of the Paschal mystery." [62] Every man who is ignorant of the Gospel of Christ and of his Church, but seeks the truth and does the will of God in accordance with his understanding of it, can be saved. It may be supposed that such persons would have desired Baptism explicitly if they had known its necessity.

1261 As regards children who have died without Baptism, the Church can only entrust them to the mercy of God, as she does in her funeral rites for them. Indeed, the great mercy of God who desires that all men should be saved, and Jesus' tenderness toward children which caused him to say: "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them," [63] allow us to hope that there is a way of salvation for children who have died without Baptism. All the more urgent is the Church's call not to prevent little children coming to Christ through the gift of holy Baptism.

VII. THE GRACE OF BAPTISM

1262 *The different effects of Baptism are signified by the perceptible elements of the sacramental rite. Immersion in water symbolizes not only death and purification, but also regeneration and renewal. Thus the two principal effects are purification from sins and new birth in the Holy Spirit.*[64]

For the forgiveness of sins . . .

1263 *By Baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin.*[65] *In those who have been reborn nothing remains that would impede their entry into the Kingdom of God, neither Adam's sin, nor personal sin, nor the consequences of sin, the gravest of which is separation from God.*

1264 *Yet certain temporal consequences of sin remain in the baptized, such as suffering, illness, death, and such frailties inherent in life as weaknesses of character, and so on, as well as an inclination to sin that Tradition calls concupiscence, or metaphorically, "the tinder for sin" (fomes peccati); since concupiscence "is left for us to wrestle with, it cannot harm those who do not consent but manfully resist it by the grace of Jesus Christ."*[66] *Indeed, "an athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules."*[67]



59 Cf. **Jn 3:5**.

⁵*Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.*

60 Cf. **Mt 28:19-20**; cf. Council of Trent (1547) DS 1618; LG 14; AG 5.

¹⁹*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."*

61 Cf. Mk 16:16.

62 GS 22 # 5; cf. LG 16; AG 7.

63 Mk 10 14; cf. 1 Tim 2:4.

64 Cf. Acts 2:38; Jn 3:5.

65 Cf. Council of Florence (1439): DS 1316.

66 Council of Trent (1546): DS 1515.

67 2 Tim 2:5.

Conclusion

So through Jesus' birth, death and resurrection, and the Sacrament of Baptism we have hope for the salvation of mankind.

As we quite clearly proclaim in the Nicene Creed {paraphrased}:

*For us men and for our salvation
he came down from heaven:*

*by the power of the Holy Spirit
he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary,
and was made man.*

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.*

*On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

*He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.*

*We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins.
We look for the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come. AMEN.*

It is our mission and responsibility to pass on this message.

In his Message for Lent in 2007 The Holy Father wrote about our responsibility to communicate this message to others:

Jesus said: "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12: 32). The response the Lord ardently desires of us is above all that we welcome his love and allow ourselves to be drawn to him. Accepting his love, however, is not enough. We need to respond to such love and devote ourselves to communicating it to others. Christ "draws me to himself" in order to unite himself to me, so that I learn to love the brothers with his own love.

This Easter time let us make a renewed effort to pass on this extraordinary message of hope and salvation for the world.

Prayer Before a Crucifix

The Crucifix forms an important part of Pope Benedict XVI theological and liturgical outlook.

He believes the Crucifix should be a focal point of our prayer, praise, worship, and adoration of God, in fact of our whole lives, and he encourages this in many of his writings.

So let us end this talk with the once popular Prayer Before a Crucifix:

Look down upon me, good and gentle Jesus, while before Your face I humbly kneel, and with burning soul pray and beseech You to fix deep in my heart lively sentiments of faith, hope, and charity, true contrition for my sins, and a firm purpose of amendment; while I contemplate with great love and tender pity Your five wounds, pondering over them within me, and calling to mind the words which, long ago, David the prophet spoke in Your own person concerning You, my Jesus: "They have pierced My hands and My feet; they have numbered all My bones." Amen.