

A.M.D.G.

## Homily Easter Sunday 2023, year A

*“When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory.”*

The resurrection of Jesus is an earth-shattering event.

I want to focus on one element of the resurrection that we see proclaimed throughout the New Testament and the tradition. Christ’s resurrection is a victory. It is a triumph over sin, over death, over the author of sin, Satan. The Sequence of Easter states, *“Death and life and contended in that combat stupendous: The Prince of life, who died, reigns immortal....Christ indeed from death is risen, our new life obtaining. Have mercy, victor King, ever reigning!”*

In order to understand the nature of this victory, we must go back to the beginning. In ancient cultures there is a widely attested myth of a combat in heaven. The myth has various versions, but the basic outline is that one of the gods steals the book of life, or the scepter of nature, fire, or whatever the gods use to control the world. Chaos and evil ensue in the world, as the renegade god wreaks havoc on his newly stolen domain. Then another god volunteers to win back the world by defeating the rebel god. He descends into the world and a deadly combat commences, which ends in the evil god dying and the new champion restoring creation and earning his place as the king of the gods.

We see echoes of this myth throughout the Scriptures, especially in the apocalyptic writings. But it is reinterpreted. In the Biblical version the renegade god is Satan, the star that is cast out of heaven after rebelling against God’s rule. He descends to earth and conquers the world, not by stealing power from God the Creator, but rather by tricking human beings into turning away from God. That is why he is the father of lies. In one of the greatest tragic ironies of human existence, which we ourselves experience if we are honest, human beings choose slavery to sin and to Satan instead of service to God.

So how does God respond to such a tragedy? What does he do? He sends the Son of Man, coming on the clouds of heaven, down to earth, in order to free the captives, redeem the sinners from their slavery, offers forgiveness and reconciliation with God, and restore the reign of God in creation. What happens is then the mortal combat between the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, and the ruler of this world, as Jesus calls him. This combat rages throughout Jesus’ public ministry, as he seeks to convince those in darkness to turn to the light, he liberates those in bondage to sin, and he sets about exorcising the power of evil from the world. But Satan does not yield, he fights back, convincing those with human power to put Jesus to death, in order to defeat his campaign before it becomes too great. Yet Jesus, and His Father, anticipated this attack. In fact, they planned for it. The crucifixion of Jesus ended up being a trap for Satan. Like an ambush predator, who waits for his victim to attack

him so that he can catch him in his web, Jesus lured Satan into the snare. He let himself be bound, condemned, and crucified, so that he could defeat sin and death from the inside. For death did not destroy Jesus; Jesus destroyed death. His death allowed him entry into the domain of death, where souls waited in the shadowy underworld, bringing new life to them through the power of the cross. In a masterful counterattack, Jesus freed the dead from their captivity, opening the gates of heaven to all who accept His rule, and then rose from the dead to bring new life to all human beings, and indeed to renew the whole of creation.

Jesus won the victory through the most torturous and ignominious death imaginable. *Because of this God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee must bend in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth.* Jesus earned his kingship. That is why the women at the tomb worship him when he appears to them. They fall at his feet. That is what we must do, worship him today and every day, for he has called us out of darkness into his wonderful light. We praise great athletes and coaches for their successes, national championships and trophies. We bow down before the king of heaven for his triumph over sin, death, and Satan.

We are also called to enter into the new life of the resurrection even now, in this world. The resurrection becomes a seed, as Jesus often explains in the parable, a seed in us that grows to eternal life. This is a reality that we can and should experience in our spiritual life. It begins with our encounter with the risen Jesus. Jesus is alive to us as he was to the women at the tomb, and to the disciples in the upper room. I worry that too many Catholics have never encountered the risen Jesus. They have never experienced in their souls the new life that

He is victorious. He is triumphant. He is Lord. Alleliua!