

HOMILY

DATE: March 31, 2024
SEASON: Easter Sunday
READINGS: Colossians 3:1-4; John 1:1-18
THEME: Christ Is Risen, Making Way for Our Resurrection

I want to begin by telling a story about a man who took a vacation to Israel with his wife and mother-in-law. Now, the man wanted it to be just him and his wife, but his wife insisted that her mother join them. He didn't really like his mother-in-law, but he decided he could tolerate her for a week. However, during their time in the Holy Land, his mother-in-law unexpectedly passed away. The following day, the husband met with the local undertaker to discuss funeral and burial options. "In cases like these," the undertaker explained, "there are a couple of options to choose from. You can ship the body home for \$5,000, or you can bury her in the Holy Land for just \$150." The man pondered this for a while, then decided it would be best to ship the body home. The undertaker was intrigued by his decision, and you might be as well, knowing what the man's feelings toward his mother-in-law were, and thinking that he would want to spend the lesser amount on her. So, the undertaker inquired, "That's an interesting choice. Can I ask why you would pay \$5,000 to ship your mother-in-law home, when you can easily bury her here for \$150?" The man promptly replied, "About 2,000 years ago, a man died and was buried here. Three days later he rose from the dead, and I can't take that chance!"

Well, the reality is that Jesus' resurrection provides more than just a chance that we will be raised from death; it absolutely guarantees it. St. Paul says that Jesus is the first fruits of everyone being raised from the dead. He says that in Adam, all died, but in Christ, all will be made alive. Every time we bury the body of one of the Faithful in the ground, we say: *"In sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ, we commend to Almighty God our loved one and friend, N., and we commit his body to the ground; (placing dirt on the casket) earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. We commit his body into Your safe keeping, Christ Jesus our Lord, until You gather it up at the final resurrection, when that which we have sown in the ground in weakness is raised up in power, transformed, made whole, and reunited with his soul to live in the fullness of Your eternal kingdom, where neither sin nor death nor the devil can spoil any longer, and where he will live among Your saints in glory forever.*

That's the fruit of Christ bursting forth from the grave. Unless Jesus returns first, everyone of our bodies will be laid in the ground, but we need not fear that. It is merely like planting a seed, and because of Christ's resurrection, that seed will sprout with a renewed body.

However, we don't have to wait until then to begin experiencing the fruit of the resurrection. That Power that overcame the grave a couple millennia ago is already at work in our inner man, our spirits, transforming us from the inside out. And if that Power can blow open a huge and heavy stone boulder, with such an explosion that it caused a great earthquake, surely that same Power can transform and remake our spirits with a new and indestructible Life, and then raise up our bodies on the last day. Hallelujah!

Well, thankfully, I loved *my* mother-in-law. And I'm *glad* that *she* will be raised from the dead. When she wrote out her instructions to her kids for when she would die, she began it by saying, "When my dear Jesus calls me home..." She loved the Lord and was absolutely confident that death was not to be feared because it was merely a short road that would bring her to her true home. She underlined many verses in her Bible, but virtually all of the ones in 1 Corinthians 15 having to do with the resurrection were underlined, and the final few verses were double underlined multiple times over so that it boldly stood out beyond all the rest. Here's what those verses say (This is from the Living Bible).

"For our earthly bodies, the ones we have now that can die, must be transformed into heavenly bodies that cannot perish but will live forever. When this happens, then at last this Scripture will come true — 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' O death, where then is your victory? Where then is your sting? For sin—the sting that causes death—will all be gone; and the law, which reveals our sins, will no longer be our judge. How we thank God for all of this, for he makes us victorious through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

That was double underlined, but there were verses underlined throughout her Bible, and notes in the margins from cover to cover. The Bible to her was a living encounter with the living Christ speaking to her, and she didn't want to forget a single thing that He said, so she wrote everything down on the pages of the Bible itself. And even if she would have written those things in a separate notebook, the point is still the same: she lived her life fully engaged with the risen Lord, her dear Jesus who would one day call her home. Who wouldn't want a mother-in-law like that to be raised from the dead?! Well, in fact, she will be, and so will all to whom Jesus is so precious and treasured with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Christ has conquered death and so shall we because of Him. Christ is Risen!