

SOLEMNITY OF EASTER

Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. ~ 1 Peter 1:8

EASTER, the celebration of Jesus' Resurrection from the dead, is the highest feast and greatest of solemnities in the Church. It ushers in its most extended season of rejoicing, the fifty-day period from Easter Sunday to Pentecost. All Sundays are feasts because Jesus' Resurrection, the "great feast," occurred on a Sunday. It is the Passover of Christ (see CCC 1168), and is always celebrated very near the date of the Jewish Passover, although the method of calculation is not exactly the same and, of course, Easter must always fall on a Sunday. (The method of calculation also differs between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches, a problem that it can be hoped will be resolved soon.)

Of all days, Easter is the day of which the Psalmist sings: "This is the day which the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Ps 118:24). We shout for joy, for our Savior has risen; he has conquered death, and he dwells in glory. Truly he is great, he is "the Son of the Most High" (Lk 1:32). He possesses "the throne of his father David, and he [reigns] over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his Kingdom there will be no end" (Lk 1:32-33). "The Lord has risen indeed" (Lk 24:34).

Christ was born, suffered, died, and rose from the dead; these are historical events. The Resurrection of Jesus was a real event, one that is at the very core of the mystery of faith "that transcends and surpasses history" (CCC 647). His Resurrection confirms his divinity and our expectation of rising with him. This is the significance of Easter for the Church and all its faithful members.

The triumphant Exsultet in the Church's Easter proclamation is sung at the Easter Vigil Mass. From the moment that the Exsultet is begun, the liturgy of Easter resounds with joy, jubilation, and shouts of "Alleluia!" The joy of Easter bursts like a long-awaited flood upon the Christian soul. One is



Mary Magdalene witnesses the risen Lord, by Domenico Mastroianni, 1876-1962

struck by the splendor of the Exsultet and the daring of its words: "O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!" (*The Roman Missal*, Mass of Easter Vigil, Easter Proclamation). This "happy fault" (*felix culpa* in Latin) is a bold declaration, a cry of hope and optimism confirming that the power of God is so incredible that he can turn sin into a means for his own glory and our good.

The Church seems unable to restrain its joy at the Resurrection: "Rejoice, O earth," it sings, "in shining splendor, radiant in the brightness of your King! Christ has conquered! Glory fills you! Darkness

vanishes forever!" It continues: "The power of this holy night dispels all evil, washes guilt away, restores lost innocence, brings mourners joy; it casts out hatred, brings us peace, and humbles earthly pride" (*The Roman Missal*, Mass of Easter Vigil, Easter Proclamation).

A 2nd- or 3rd-century Christian writer sang thus: "O spiritual feast! O divine Passover!... O festival of the whole cosmos! O joy of the universe, its honor, its banquet and delight!... Heaven's gates have opened; God has appeared as a human being and human beings have risen as God.... O divine Passover, to us you have spiritually united the God whom the Heavens cannot contain" (*Ancient Paschal homily* 62).

A Father of the Church, St. Gregory Nazianzen, carried away by the glory of Easter, cried out: "O great and holy Easter, I speak of you as of a living being" (*Oratio XLV*). Easter is the glorious feast of faith. The Risen Jesus says to each of us, as he said to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (Jn 11:25-26). Blessed will be we who can reply, inspired by God's goodness and grace, "Yes, Risen Lord, I believe." This

belief will merit an eternal Easter.

(CCC 647, 655, 1168-1170)

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