



Things to Ponder

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It's a Wonderful Life (Easter Sunday)

By Rev. Msgr. Kevin T. Hart

Perhaps because it is the most momentous event in the history humankind, the Resurrection of Jesus is often critiqued, questioned, rethought, and debunked by the greatest and smallest of human minds. Did Jesus really rise from the dead? How could this be? Wasn't his body just stolen and hidden? Were the disciples the architects of the greatest ruse that history has ever witnessed? These are questions which present themselves almost naturally and inevitably because to rise from the dead is so utterly contrary to human reason.

Jesus' resurrection will always be open to historical, scientific and reasonable investigation. And because of that, every human being in the past, today, and in the future will be confronted with the same choice that confronted the first disciples of Jesus who peered into an empty tomb: "to believe or not believe." That is the question, that is the ultimate choice. Do we believe, really believe, that Jesus rose from the dead and that his rising is the anticipation of our own, or do we not?

Easter is not only a story of belief in the Resurrection of Jesus, but also belief in our ourselves, in who we really are. The resurrection of Jesus is not just a one-time miraculous event, not just some fluke of history, not just Jesus' reward for his death on the cross, and not just some proof that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. Easter is the celebration of the first human being to rise from the dead. Not the only, just the first. Easter is not just a celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus, but also a celebration of our ultimate resurrection as well. We celebrate the fact that God calls us into existence not just for a time, but for all time. We celebrate the fact that we live in a world in which we need not, and cannot, conceive of ourselves as not present. Not now, not ever.

Let's imagine, for a moment, a world in which Jesus did not rise from the dead, and neither will we. If that were our world, ours would hardly be a wonderful life. In terms of our faith, we would not be here celebrating this Eucharist, celebrating the death and the resurrection of the Lord. There would be no tabernacle for the reserved real presence of that Risen Lord. And even if there were, in approaching it we might here a voice addressing us with the very same words that the angel addressed the first disciples to peer into the empty tomb: "He is not here."

Our life would be one in which we slip into existence for a brief shining moment, and

then slip out. That's it. Nothing, absolutely nothing, would ultimately really matter. For everything eventually would end. Why struggle to be good? Why struggle to be anything? Why worry about handing down anything to our children or generations to come; for they too, at some point, would cease to exist. Sickness, pain, and, of course death, would have no meaning whatsoever. Neither would wealth, talent, or happiness in this life, for it would all come to an end. This is the kind of world that disbelief in the resurrection logically demands. And this is the kind of world we would be living in, were it not for Jesus' resurrection.

Easter gives us a choice. We can choose to believe, or choose not to, or even choose not to choose. But in that choice, we make a host of other choices as well. We choose whether we want our lives, or anything in life, to have a purpose, or no purpose at all. We choose whether we are destined to live with God forever, or, at death, simply return to the great floating junkyard of the cosmos.

For most of us, perhaps, this choice is not so sharp, not so decisive. We celebrate the Resurrection, well, because we always do. If asked, do you believe, we would say, "Well, yes." But we fail at times, maybe even most of the time, to realize the implications of that belief in our everyday lives. Do the things we worry about, and plan on, and fear, and accomplish or avoid - do these concerns confirm or vitiate our belief in the Resurrection of Jesus, in the resurrection of ourselves?

David Hume, the 18th century Scottish philosopher, once reflected on the role that belief of the heart plays in a religion where what we believe cannot be proven to the intellect. "The Christian religion," he wrote, "not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one. Mere reason is insufficient to convince us of Christianity's veracity; and whoever is moved by faith to assent to it, is conscious of a continued miracle in his own person, which subverts all the principles of understanding, and gives him a determination to believe what is most contrary to custom and experience."

May the Holy Spirit bless us with insight into the unbelievable event we celebrate, and help us to realize more and more, that by the Resurrection, ours too is indeed a wonderful life.

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St. Andrew Apostle Catholic Church, Silver Spring, Maryland



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