

Easter Sunday: More Than Conquerors

Rom 8:32: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave himself up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?" (meaning all good things)

This is the conclusion of what our Christian faith is about. How do we get there? How did they get there in that time in the early church?

We have the account in John 20 of the first appearance to Mary Magdalene. They were preparing for a funeral. All their hopes had crashed. They were sad and totally confused. They came bringing spices to prepare the body and then he appeared to her, to Mary Magdalene.

We must understand that they were not stupid people. They knew about ghosts and they also knew, as Mary Magdalene points out, that someone could have moved the body. Or someone could have stolen it. When the same account is described in Luke 24:11, when the women came back and told the apostles what had happened, the text says, "[I]t seemed to them an idle tale. . . ."

It is more of an idle tale today because we are caught in all kinds of virtual reality and fantasy stories. This sounds like another fantasy story. Hollywood or science fiction. And yet out of this these people turned around not only to conquer the Roman Empire but to spread a religion which has become the #1 religion in the world in our time.

In this same section in Romans 8 Paul writes (vs 37): "We are more than conquerors in him who loved us." That is redundant. How can you be more than a conqueror? If you are a conqueror, you win. And yet he is pointing out that the resurrection is beyond all that.

What is the basis from which they worked? It was not because the tomb was empty or people told confused stories about seeing the resurrected Lord. The basis is what happened on the cross. You recall how in John 19:30 it says: "It is finished." Meaning: It is terminated. The work of salvation is over. It does not mean it is the goal but the end. As in Romans 10:4: "Christ is the end of the law." Meaning he is not the goal of the law but he is the termination of the law. The last judgment took place on the cross, for those who are in Christ. It is finished.

In a remarkable way what is finished is the beginning, the beginning of something totally new. That is what we celebrate: **the total newness**. What is it that is new? It is often not seen that in the New Testament death is seen as the result of sin. As Paul writes in Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death." Romans 5:12: "As sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned." The same is true in 1 Cor 15:56: "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law." "Sting" meaning the cause of death is sin.

This means that the biggie is the cross because it is true that death is conquered, but in order to conquer death one has to conquer the cause of death, which is sin. We sometimes confuse that and say the big thing is the resurrection, but it is not through the conquering of death that one conquers sin. Vice versa. The cross is causative and the resurrection is confirmatory. Not to take away the resurrection. We have to see it in perspective. The resurrection without the cross is a fantasy, and the cross without the resurrection is a tragedy. They belong together. It is important to understand that one

is causative and the other confirms the biggie. This is what salvation is: Through Jesus Christ on the cross he conquers sin, then death and the devil.

What happened on the cross is the big event not only in all of history but for all eternity because there God fought against God, and God changed, and forever and through eternity God is the crucified One who has taken on our sin.

This blows our minds. We have no categories that are adequate. In Romans 4 Paul spells out how this works. He says the big thing (Romans 4:5) is that the ungodly are made godly. That is to say, the really difficult thing is that holiness could take on sin. Paul says this also in 2 Cor 5:21: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (Or the "holiness" of God).

He took on our sin and we took on his holiness. The best business deal of all time. The happy exchange. Because God did that, as a consequence, he also put life in place of death, as Paul puts it in Romans 4.

We see how it is possible to say that the Lord created everything out of nothing. But this is a minor thing compared to making godly those who are ungodly. In 2 Cor 5:17 it says when you and I are in Christ we are a "new creation." That word "new" is something different from the usual word "new." I rejoice in the Easter flowers, the Easter clothes, the chicks and bunnies, and everything that relates to the rite of Spring, but it is not adequate. There are no analogies. What happens on the cross and resurrection is not something that can be adequately described through our experience or anything that we call "fact." It blows those categories apart. This is the category that creates all other categories. And therefore **the total newness of the resurrection.**

What does this say for you? Because all of this is back there and may seem abstract and theoretical. What does this say to you?

Luther preached the sermon at the death of Duke Frederick. He made a distinction between the Big Death and the little death. He said the Big Death took place on Calvary where judgment was complete. You and I when we are baptized take part in the Big Death, as in Romans 6:5: "If you have been united with him in a death like his, you will **certainly** be united with him in a resurrection like his."

That is the Big Death. The little death, not to make light of the fact that we go through something called death, is secondary and incidental in light of the Big Death that is already accomplished. Therefore we can rejoice and say with Paul in Romans 8:31-32: "What can we say to this? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?"

And the answer, of course, is "Yes." Amen.