



Saint Thomas Church Fifth Avenue
in the City of New York

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Sunday, February 11, 2001
The Sixth Sunday after Epiphany

Choral Eucharist
at 11am

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Andrew C. Mead, Rector
on
I Corinthians 15:12-20
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THE RESURRECTION AND NOTHING LESS

If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Throughout this Epiphany season, the Church lectionary has appointed the Epistle reading to be from Saint Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians. Last Sunday, today, and next Sunday the readings are from the great fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians, which is the Apostle's teaching on the Resurrection.

If ever there were a "core doctrine" of Christianity, it is this: the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and, therefore, the Resurrection of all who are "in Christ" as their full inheritance of everlasting life. In today's reading, Saint Paul spells out this wonderful teaching with powerful reasoning. But before we unfold that reasoning, let us reflect for a moment upon its basis in last week's reading.

Last week, the Apostle said that the first and foremost Fact of all facts upon which the Gospel is based is that Christ died and was raised, both dying and rising in fulfillment of the Scriptures, and that his death and resurrection were *witnessed*. He then lists the eyewitnesses of the risen Lord, concluding with himself, who had once been a persecutor of the Church but was now putting his life on the line for the truth of Christ. Indeed, it was precisely the appearance of the risen Lord to Paul that turned him from a persecutor into an apostle.

Now today Paul confronts the fact that there are people in the Church who say there is no Resurrection of the Dead. You see that some things never change, and it should not surprise or alarm us when Christians, even church leaders, deny the Gospel. It has been that way from the start. However, as Paul shows us, we should not settle for anything less than the real thing! Let us have no cut-rate or counterfeit gospels.

First of all, says the Apostle, if there is no Resurrection of the Dead, clearly Christ himself has not been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching and our faith are vain and we are found to be misrepresenting God! The consequences are dire: our faith is an exercise in futility, we are still awash in our sins with no liberation, and the dead have simply perished. If Christ is not raised, then all we can say, especially to those who are poor or who have a hard time in this life, is -- Tough luck!

Christianity is not simply a philosophy about God and life. It is a *proclamation of Good News*. The news is that Jesus Christ, who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, was raised on the third day after his death. His tomb was found empty, and he was seen alive by his disciples under many different circumstances. So certain were the disciples of his Resurrection, that its immediate effects were seen in their transformation into his bold witnesses in the face of often ferocious opposition and persecution. Far from being crushed out, they took the Christian Gospel throughout the world

The Resurrection is not simply the Good News that Jesus of Nazareth was alive after his crucifixion and death. The Resurrection is the confirmation of Jesus' own ministry and message. The Resurrection proves Jesus is who he said he is, God's incarnate Son and the authoritative spokesman of God's Kingdom. His miracles, his teaching, his forgiveness of sins, his claim of only-begotten Sonship from the God he constantly called Father – all these were ratified by his Resurrection.

Paul says something very severe. If Christians hope in Christ for this life only, then we are of all people the most to be pitied! Remember the world-weary, blue Peggy Lee song, "Is that all there is?" The refrain says it all. "Is that all there is? Is that all there is? Well if that's all there is, my friend, then let's keep dancing, and break out the booze, and have a ball." Another variation of this theme might be the vulgar tee shirt I have seen from time to time: "He who dies with the most toys wins."

But the fact is, this is by no means all there is. Furthermore, the one who dies with the most toys cannot take them with him. As Christ said in his Parable of the Rich Fool: "You fool, this night your soul will be required of you; and the things you have gathered, whose will they be? Thus will it be for the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich in the things of God." (Lk 12:20ff)

So who is the fool, Christ or the worldly man? The Resurrection is the fact that created the catholic and apostolic Church out of that motley band of meek and frightened little people. The Resurrection is what inspired them, and all Christians who believe their testimony, to stake their lives on Christ.

At the beginning of I Corinthians, the Apostle writes, "Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?" Yes he has, and he done it through the Resurrection of our crucified Lord. "We preach Christ crucified," says Paul, "a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men." It is Christ's Resurrection that has made this so.

Dear beloved, the Resurrection of Jesus has not only confirmed his message and set God's seal of truth upon all he said and did. Christ's Resurrection is not only the ground on which the Church, including this church, stands (and the scaffolding is a reminder of that!) The Resurrection of Christ means that Jesus our Lord is immediately present to all of us, in Scripture, in prayer, in the Sacrament, in fellowship, in works of mercy and love.

And there is still more. The Resurrection of Christ is only the first installment of this great gift. We will be raised too, with all who are in Christ and who love his appearing. As the Apostle writes a few passages later after today's Epistle, We shall not all sleep [in death], but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of eye at the last trump. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. That is, we shall be raised like Christ and clothed with immortality. You can bet your life on it. That's what the Gospel invites us to do, to lay hold of eternal life here and now, and inherit it forever. Don't settle for anything less than the real thing!

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.