

RESURREXIT SICUT DIXIT! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA! HE IS RISEN AS HE SAID! ALLELUIA! ALLELUIA!

OK, first your RISUS PASCHALIS, or EASTER JOKE, continuing the centuries long tradition of telling jokes during the Easter season since God played the biggest joke on the devil on Easter Sunday morning by raising Jesus from the dead.

A man is driving along a highway and sees a rabbit jump out across the middle of the road. He swerves to avoid hitting it, but unfortunately the rabbit jumps right in front of the car. The driver, a sensitive man as well as an animal lover, pulls over and gets out to see what has become of the rabbit. Much to his dismay, the rabbit is the Easter Bunny, and he is DEAD!

The driver feels so awful that he begins to cry. A beautiful blonde woman driving down the highway sees the man crying on the side of the road and pulls over. She steps out of the car and asks the man what's wrong. "I feel terrible," he explains, "I accidentally hit the Easter Bunny with my car and I KILLED HIM!" The blond says, "Don't worry." She runs to her car and pulls out a spray can. She walks over to the limp, dead Easter Bunny, bends down, and sprays the contents onto him.

The Easter Bunny jumps up, waves its paw at the two of them and hops off down the road. Ten feet away he stops, turns around and waves again, hops another ten feet, turns and waves, and repeats this again and again and again and again, until he hops out of sight. The man is astounded. He runs over to the woman and demands, "What is in that can? What did you spray on the Easter Bunny?" The woman turns the can around so that the man can read the label. It says.....Are you ready for this?.....You know you're gonna be sorry!.....Last chance.....OK, here it is.....It says "HAIR SPRAY – Restores life to dead hair, and adds permanent wave."

Joshua Sasaki Roshi is an eminent Zen master from Japan. He gave a retreat a number of years ago at a Christian monastery. Sensitive to the nature of his surroundings, he asked for a copy of the New Testament and a Japanese-American dictionary so that the retreat would be both a Christian and Zen experience. Carefully studying the New Testament writings, he was able to offer many startling insights to the participants from their own Bible, even though it was his first encounter with the Scriptures.

On the 5th night of the retreat, one of the participants went to see the Zen master. When they had seated themselves comfortably on the floor, the Zen master smiled and said to the participant: "I like Christianity. But I would not like Christianity without the resurrection." Then he added: "Show me your resurrection. I want to see your resurrection." In his simplicity and clarity, the master had gone right to the heart of our faith. With his directness he was saying what everyone else implicitly says to us Christians: "You are a Christian. You are risen with Christ. Then show me your resurrection. Show me – and then I too, will believe." (From Basil Pennington's "Western Contemplative Spirituality" in THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATOR.)

Easter is a great story. Angels, an empty tomb, weeping women, running disciples. But that was then. This is now. What does it all MEAN? Show me YOUR RESURRECTION! In the lovely lines of Gerard Manley Hopkins, we want the risen Lord to 'easter in us, be a dayspring to the dimness of us, be a crimson-crested east." (from THE WRECK OF THE DEUTSCHLAND) But HOW do we have resurrection in us? How does Christ Easter in us?

It has to do with living the risen life NOW. It has to do with THIS life with the fullest of intentions, with the fullest of zest. After all, this is the only life we've got! We need to pray that the Lord will keep us alive for AS LONG AS WE LIVE! We all know people who quit living years ago – but they're just too cheap to pay for a funeral. They are always dull, bored, cynical, can't find anything to be positive about. But however small our saucepan is, it ought to be on full boil! Easter reminds us that Easter life is NOT just about life after this one, life in eternity, life in the far distant future. Easter life for the believer is NOW. Listen to this RESURRECTION LIFE description from Frederick Buechner: "In certain, holy moments, the wonder of God's world is transparent to us, so wonderfully evident that we praise God:

It is like your birthday, and there are many presents to open. The world is to open. The rain rattles softly at the window like the fingers of a child as I sit on the edge of the tub to tie my shoes. It comes down the glass in crooked paths to stir my heart absurdly as it always has, and dear God in heaven, the sound of it on the roof, on the taut black silk of the umbrella, on the catalpa leaves, dimpling the glassy surface of the peepering pond. It is the rain, and it tastes of silver; it is the rain and it smells of christening. The rain is falling on the morning of my first day, and everything is wet with it; wet earth, wet fur, the smell of the grass when it is wet, the smell of the wet pavements of the city and the sound of tires on the wet streets, the wet hair and face of a woman doing errands in the rain. Wherever my feet take me now, it will be to something wet, something new, that I have never seen before.

You wonder about life on distant worlds -- if there is any life on them, the extravagances of nature there, the convolutions of unimaginable histories and geographies there, and now on THIS distant world that is YOURS and that YOU have awakened to, you will see it all for yourself. You have only to look through this rain washed glass to see what astronomers from other worlds would travel light-years to see: this third planet from the sun with the rain falling, the glint of water taps, tub rim, through the window the cat licking its silken wrist under the eaves. The curious rendezvous as you as you get to your feet, both shoes tied, and stand there with the whole weight of you, everything that goes by your name, pressing down for all you're worth upon the shaggy pelt of this planet which with its whole vast bulk and for all its worth presses up to resist you – this encounter, this tryst, between you and your planet, each of you so gentle yet unyielding and firm with the other. And you will see faces before this first day is done; each the only one of its kind in the universe, each the face of a high king whose line reaches back unbroken through unnumbered generations, through ancient cities and forgotten battles, past dim, gibbering rain forests to the very beginnings of history itself and beyond, and they will speak to you in words soft and worn from centuries of handling....as you meet in the mystery of this rainy morning. (ALPHABET OF GRACE, p. 36-38)

Now THAT'S RESURRECTION LIVING! THAT'S FULLNESS OF LIFE! That's recognizing the presence of the Risen Lord in every facet of our daily living, including something as simple – and as wonderful – as the rain. But HOW do we do that? Well, there are some questions that might be a helpful start to take our pulse – to see JUST HOW ALIVE we really are.

Have we wept at anything during the last year? Has our heart beat faster at the sight of young beauty? Have we thought seriously about the fact that someday we are going to die? Is there anyone we know, in whose place, if they had to suffer great pain, we would volunteer ourself? Will the world DEFINITELY, POSITIVELY be a better place because we have been here? Will people be genuinely saddened by my death? Will a charity be richer, a church more authentic, someone OUTSIDE my family have been enriched by my life and generosity? (Even the Mafia are good to their own family!) If the answer to all or most of these questions is NO, the chances are that we're dead. But if the answer is YES, then we are well on the way to letting Christ EASTER in us.

You know, I've never gone to a home after the father of a family has died in which I've heard the complaint: "He should have worked more." Too often the world whirls along, and the faster it goes, the less apt are nourishing activities to be included in our daily or weekly schedules. Too many people in our culture confuse having a job with having a life. What a shame that the Lord gives us this whole world to enjoy and we often just ignore it as we rush off to the next thing on our overly busy schedules. Amazing that in the ancient world ONLY slaves had to work 7 days a week – and we can't find time for an hour to stop and come to church on Sundays – and then enjoy the day with family, fun and relaxation. A life of all work is NOT resurrection living!

It is something like Anthony DeMello's story where a Master was asked questions about life beyond the grave. But the Master only laughed and did not give a single answer. To his disciples, who demanded to know the reason for his evasiveness, he later said, "Have you observed that it is precisely those who do not know what to do with this life who want another that will last forever?" "But is there life after death or is there not?" persisted a disciple. "Is there life BEFORE death? – that is the question!" said the Master.

There also is a certain spirit of humility to true Easter living. We recognize that we know more truth than we can live and that we have forgotten more than we ever really KNEW. We see how complex – and rich – and impossible to judge – so much of life truly is. As Hopkins said Life is "dappled, fickle, freckled." Remember one of my favorite lines from the poet Mary Oliver: "When it's over, I want to say: all my life I was a bride married to amazement. I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms. I don't want to end up simply having visited this world." (WHEN DEATH COMES)

Life also requires a certain sense of perspective. Not all things are the same. One of life's best coping mechanisms is to know the difference between an inconvenience and a problem. If we break our neck, if we have nothing to eat, if our house is on fire – then we've got a problem. Everything else is an inconvenience. Life is inconvenient. Life is lumpy. A lump in the oatmeal, a lump in the throat, and a lump in the breast are not the same kind of lump. (Fulghum) We have to know the difference to live a Resurrection life.

A story and some final remarks.

She had every reason to be bitter. Though talented, she went unrecognized for years. Prestigious opera circles closed their ranks when she tried to enter. American critics ignored her compelling voice. She was repeatedly rejected for parts for which she easily qualified. It was only after she went to Europe and won the hearts of tough-to-please European audiences that stateside opinion leaders acknowledged her talent.

Not only was her professional life a battle, her personal life was marked by many challenges. She was the mother of 2 handicapped children, one severely mentally handicapped. At one point, in order to escape the pace of New York City, she purchased a home on Martha's Vineyard. It burned to the ground 2 days before she was to move in.

Professional rejection. Personal setbacks. Perfect soil for the seeds of bitterness. A receptive field for the roots of resentment. But in this case, anger found no home.

Her friends didn't call her bitter; they called her BUBBLES. Who is she?

Beverly Sills. Internationally acclaimed opera singer. Once director of the New York Opera.

Her phrases were sugared with laughter. Her face was softened with serenity. Upon interviewing her, Mike Wallace of 60 minutes stated that 'she is one of the most impressive – if not the MOST impressive – ladies I've ever interviewed.'

How can a person handle such professional rejection and personal trauma and still be known as BUBBLES? “I choose to be cheerful,” she said. “Years ago, I knew I had little or no choice about success, circumstances or even happiness; but I knew I could choose to be cheerful.” THAT’S RESURRECTION LIVING. That is letting Christ EASTER in us. A United Methodist Bishop once said: “If you are at the stage of life or age when your back goes out more than you do, do not let your aches get in the way of your alleluias” I like that – do not let your aches get in the way of your alleluias.

Some RESURRECTION LIVING SUGGESTIONS:

Read a bit

Listen to a favorite song

Call a friend

Remember a kindness

Help the poor

Keep perspective

Smile broadly

Laugh loudly

Close doors gently

Do what you can

Live gratefully

Relax for a moment

Breathe deeply

Tease yourself often

Take a quiet walk

Tell God a funny story (Robert J. Wicks)

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