

Easter (9 April 2023)

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on earth.”

+In the Name...

Ahhhh... are you glad the stress is over? You know what I mean: you finished all the Easter shopping, filled out all your Easter cards, and attended all your Easter gatherings. No? Well, maybe you are at least pleased that you will no longer have to bear those Easter commercials or wear those tacky Easter sweaters. And not a moment too soon you can take down the Easter tree and all those twinkling Easter lights you painstakingly hung in the windows of your home.

No, that does not describe the pre-Easter period in your home? I am truly happy to hear that news. You should be equally happy to learn that description does not accurately portray me either.

But why is that? Why has the religious message of Christmas been entirely subsumed by Santa Claus, Frosty the Snowman, Rudolph, and things far more secular, while Easter has remained relatively unscathed? I say “relatively” because surely we have to deal with Easter Bunnies (I, for one, am hardly willing to give up my Cadbury Crème Eggs!), chicks, ducklings, and other oddities that have some generic “new life in springtime” theme, but the culture does not seem as interested in giving this Holy Day the same secular makeover that has befallen the beloved Feast of the Nativity.

The answer, I submit to you, is a lack of a suitable veneer. Those of us who have ever lived inside the beltway got used to everything being presented with a heavily lacquered veneer, and polished to a full gloss. Our politicians, without regard to which side of the political aisle they call home – and those who straddle said aisle as well – have made an art out of perfecting the packaging, with little regard to the

present inside. We can all get excited about Mary and Joseph snuggling with the infant Jesus in the cozy barn while the peaceful animals look on... You can almost hear the angelic tones of the heavenly host: “Peace on earth; goodwill toward men.” It is a moment co-sponsored by the Hallmark Channel and MSNBC. We all want peace. We all want families to have cozy, quality time together.

But then what do we do with this fellow, and worse yet, His followers, who believe that He has risen from the dead? By definition, every human being has to be born, so unbelievers can say things like Christ was a good teacher or led a holy life, without fully buying into the theological truth that He was and is the incarnate Son of God. But Easter is an entirely different issue. Everyone is born, but not everyone rises from the dead. In fact, the list of names in history who qualify, is somewhere between unbelievably short and non-existent. There is no place for the “I-believe-Christ-was-a-good-teacher-but-

not-God” opinion when it comes to the Resurrection: simply, either He rose from the dead on Easter or He did not. The nonsense we are fed about Christ experiencing a “spiritual resurrection” should be dismissed for the poppycock it is, and buried in the now-empty tomb!

Several years ago the *London Times* ran an article on Good Friday encouraging the great religions of the world to emphasize the “universal truths” (that is plural) that they all share. The article concluded with, “The Easter message draws the devout together. From suffering, goodness can triumph. Death is not final. That is what all faiths... can proclaim and where they can come together this weekend.”

Whoa! As my cousin was fond of saying, “Back up the bus!” If I went to a mosque during Ramadhan, I would expect to be taught what Islam teaches. Likewise, if I went to a synagogue during Yom Kippur, I would expect to be taught what Judaism teaches. Yet the *Times*

seems to be suggesting that Christianity take the message from its holiest feast of the year and water it down to nothing more than an ecumenical Boy Scout slogan. Not in this church!

Yes, we have to find common ground and get along. There is no room in this world for blowing up the buildings, airplanes and automobiles of others with whom we disagree, religiously or otherwise. But that reality does not change that Easter, of all days, is our day to proclaim the uniqueness of the Christian faith: that Jesus Christ the Son of God, was born of the Virgin Mary, lived and breathed on this earth, was crucified by a puppet government after a sham trial, died, was buried in the ground, but rose again three days later, all in atonement for the sins of all mankind. No other religion on the planet teaches anything like it, and neither any of them nor any secular government should expect us to keep quiet about it. As one of my professors in college used to say, “The problem with ecumenism

is that you give up what you like, and I give up what I like, and now we're both unhappy."

Even a statement as benign as, "from suffering, goodness can triumph" can be hard to fathom if one does not believe in something bigger than oneself. Maybe if the evil is happening in the Ukraine, or some country you would not even know is in the Middle East except that the talking head on the news told you that is where it is located, but make it local and the "goodness" will be much more elusive. To proclaim, "from suffering, goodness can triumph," does not that encourage those responsible for the atrocities we witness in the news to do more of the same? By causing more suffering, they bring about more goodness. Hardly.

Think back to last Sunday: Palm Sunday. Do you remember the last line of the Gospel? (It was the Passion according to St. Matthew, so your legs were probably pretty stiff by the time we got to it!) The

Roman centurion, who was watching Jesus and witnessed the earthquake and the rocks split in two, declared, “Truly this was the Son of God.” What do you think that man said to his friends and family later? “I know you all have great faith already. Isn’t it wonderful that we’re all on different paths to the same place?” No, he would have said, “The God you have been worshipping by various names has come down to us in Jesus Christ, and has done something new in that same Jesus, changing world history and even the meaning of human life.” The Resurrection was the pinnacle of human history: all events prior to it were working toward it, and all events after exist in its shadow.

Easter is about real life, not some non-existent secular humanist utopia. Easter is about God calling the world to account and setting up His new, glorious creation of freedom and peace, and summoning

all people everywhere to live in this new world. We Christians are called to celebrate that calling with joyous and uninhibited worship.

Please forgive me for stating the obvious, but Easter is about Jesus: the Jesus Who announced God's saving, sovereign Kingdom; the Jesus Who died in order to triumph over the power of the rulers of this world; the Jesus Who rose again victoriously to be crowned king over all things in heaven and on earth. May God give us the grace always to live as Easter people, celebrating Christ's love at His Holy altar and making His kingdom known throughout the world.

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