

Easter (31 March 2024)

“Then cometh Simon Peter following him, and went into the sepulchre, and seeth the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself. Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed. For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead.”

+In the Name of..

“Alleluia, alleluia! We don’t know what it means but we know why we say it!” Honesty is always the best policy, not just when it’s a clergyman preaching his Easter sermon. I was recently directed by a parishioner to a video of a British priest who began an Easter sermon this way. He claimed that the shortest sermon ever preached at a particular British theological college consisted of those 15 words. While I have no way of knowing what was the shortest sermon ever preached at that now-closed theological

college in question, I am not sure if we, at least on this side of the pond, do know why we say “alleluia”. But maybe I am too cynical, admittedly, not a good trait to have on this most joyous of all days. My fear is that it has become a knee-jerk reaction, the same way we say “How are you” to someone we hardly know in the grocery store, as we hurry about our day, without any real interest in what the answer might be. Perish forbid our acquaintance says anything beyond “fine”, and we have to break stride and actually listen to the response!

Allow me to share another quote with you: “We are constantly assured that the churches are empty because preachers insist too much upon doctrine – 'dull dogma,' as people call it. The fact is the precise opposite. It is the neglect of dogma that makes for dullness. The Christian faith is the most exciting drama that ever staggered the imagination of man – and the dogma is the drama.” Now my question to you this morning, even before we tackle the question of who may have penned these words, is when

do you think they were written? I am frequently bombarded with articles, whether of the old-fashioned variety or in a more contemporary medium, claiming some variation on this: our civilization is too advanced for the Church to push its fairy tales, and in order for the Church to survive She must adapt. The quote I just shared with you was written by the British novelist and Anglican laywoman Dorothy L. Sayers – nearly 80 years ago. What is particularly telling is that the author was what we call in the business a “PK”, that is, a preacher’s kid. As my own children can attest, it is a particularly inglorious vocation where one is always under a microscope, and yet frequently sees the very worst side of the politics of Holy Mother Church. Which is why I find it fascinating, albeit also understandable upon further reflection, that she would reach her conclusion.

Dorothy Sayers knew the truth in what the Church has always taught: that God loved the world so much that He sent His only Son into the world to save us from our sins. Sin came into the

world through mankind in the Garden of Eden because of pride. Because sin came through humans, redemption also had to come through a human. But only God was capable of paying the price, resulting in the need for a God-man, to be found in the person of Jesus Christ – fully God and fully human. The Church calls this the “Incarnation”: God humbling Himself by coming to earth in the form of a human. Furthermore, we believe that this person of Jesus Christ really walked the face of the earth and that after a very short career of only three years, He was arrested, sentenced in a sham trial, and executed in humiliating fashion on a cross. None of this was a figment of the overactive imagination of some Jewish or Greek scholar some two thousand years ago, but actually happened, no matter how incredible it may seem to our so-called “enlightened” minds of the 21st century.

St. Paul, not known for sugar-coating what he was trying to say, tells the Church in Corinth that if they only believe that Christ walked the earth and that He did not rise again from the dead,

that we of all men are the most miserable. St. Paul saw the “luxuries” afforded Christians in the Early Church: 11 of the 12 Apostles received a martyr’s death. They knew Jesus Christ: they walked with Him, talked with Him, and ate with Him. Surely, they would not have been willing to die horrible deaths as a testament to someone who had only experienced a “spiritual resurrection”.

Yes, the Church is dogmatic, or at least can be on the matters that are of the utmost importance. What after all, could be more important than one’s salvation? So, She insists on the belief that Our Lord physically rose from the dead on the third day after He was crucified, as attested to by the women and apostles who looked into the empty tomb in the Gospel according to St. John that we just heard, not to mention the other Gospel accounts.

So we join our priest friend in the Church of England in proclaiming “Alleluia, alleluia” not because we do not know what it means (For the record, it means, “God be praised”) but because we do know why we say it: this so-called “dull doctrine” of which

we are accused, is the only hope we have in this world that seems to get a little crazier all the time. Only with belief in the physical resurrection in this life of Our Lord Jesus Christ, can we be assured of *our* resurrection in the life to come! Alleluia, alleluia! The Lord is risen indeed. And for that may Jesus Christ be praised.

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