

## **The Holy and Saving Pascha, by St. Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>1</sup>**

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Let us consider the prophecy which says, "This is the day which the Lord has made". In it there is no hard or laborious work, but happiness and joy and gladness, as the word puts it, "Let us rejoice and be glad in it." What kind commands! What sweet legislation! Who postpones obedience to such commands? Who does not reckon the slightest delay in the commands as loss? Joy is the task, gladness the injunction, and by these the condemnation for sin is lifted and sorrows are transformed into happiness. That is what the wise saying means, "In the day of gladness ills are not remembered". This day brought the forgetting of the previous sentence against us, or rather its annulment, not just forgetting; it destroyed every single trace of our condemnation. Our child-bearing once brought pains, our birth now is free from labour. Once we were born as flesh from flesh, now what is born is spirit from spirit. Once we were born children of men, now as children of God. Once we were dismissed from heaven to earth, now the Heavenly One has made us heavenly. Once death reigned through sin, now justice has taken over power through life. There was one once who opened the way into death, and there is one now through whom life is introduced instead. Once through death we fell away from life, now it is by life that death is destroyed. Once for shame we hid behind the fig tree, now for glory we approach the tree of life. Once for disobedience we were evicted from the garden, now for faith we come within the garden, Again the fruit of life lies open to our grasp for our enjoyment. Again the garden fountain, dividing fourfold in gospel rivers, waters all the face of the church, so that the furrows of our souls, which the sower of the word cut with the plough of teaching, are cheered with drinking, and the harvest of virtue abounds.

What then remains for such as us to do? What but to imitate prophetic hills and mountains in their leaping? "The mountains", it says, "leaped like rams, and the hills like young lambs." Let us say, "The Lord is a great God", and "a great king over all the earth" is he who "has blessed the crown of the year with his goodness" and gathered us into this spiritual choir in Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup>The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa. Ed. by Andreas Spira and Christoph Klock. Patristic Monograph Series, No.9, 1981. p.51

4/22/19

**A Reading from an Easter Sermon of Pope St Leo the Great.<sup>2</sup>**

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*Though we once knew Christ according to the flesh, we now do so no longer.* The resurrection of the Lord did not mean the end of his flesh, but its transformation, and his bodily substance was not consumed by its increase in power. The quality changed, but the nature did not pass away. What could die became immortal, what could be harmed became incorruptible. And so he says correctly that he no longer knows the body of Christ in its former state, because there remains nothing in it subject to suffering or to weakness. It remains essentially human, but surpasses itself through the glory of the resurrection. It is not surprising that Paul says this of the body of Christ, when he says about Christians who live according to the Spirit, *From now on, we know no one according to the flesh.* From now on, he says, resurrection in Christ has begun in us; from Christ who died for all comes the shape of all our hope. We do not hold back through diffidence, nor are we held in suspense through uncertainty: we have received the beginnings of what we are promised, and see already with the eyes of faith the things that will be ours. Rejoicing in the lifting up of our nature, we possess already all that we believe.

Therefore, let us not be taken up by the appearances of things that pass, nor let things which are merely of this earth turn our thoughts from the things of heaven. Let us take as passing those things which have even now scarcely any reality; and with our minds intent on those that endure, let us fix our desire there where what is offered is eternal. For though we are saved only in hope, and carry with us still our corruptible and mortal body, yet we rightly claim to be no longer in the flesh if carnal passions do not rule us: rightly do we disclaim allegiance to something which no longer holds us in its power. And so when the Apostle says: "*Make no provision for the flesh, to follow its desires,*" we understand that he has not forbidden those things consistent with our bodily health, or those demanded by human weakness. But in that we are not to cater to all our desires, or fulfill all that the flesh covets, we recognize that he has warned us to observe a certain measure of temperance, that the flesh, which is created subject to the soul, is not given too much, nor is denied what is necessary.

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<sup>2</sup>*Sermo de Resurrectione Domini* l. --nn 4-5; SC, Vol 74, pp 125-126.

## **A Discourse on Christ's Resurrection, by Symeon the New Theologian.<sup>3</sup>**

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Already Easter, that joyful day, that day of all gladness and delight, the day of Christ's resurrection, has arrived in the circle of the year. But rather, it happens daily and eternally in those who know its mystery, and so has filled our hearts with unspeakable joy and gladness.

Let us look and carefully examine what is the mystery of that resurrection of Christ our God which takes place mystically in us at all times, if we are willing, and how Christ is buried in us as in a tomb and how He unites Himself to our souls and rises again, and raises us with Himself. Such is the aim of our discourse.

Christ our God was hanged on the cross and nailed on it the sin of the world. He tasted death and went down to the uttermost depths of hell. Again, He returned from hell into His own spotless body, from which He had in no way been separated as He descended thither, and forthwith He arose from the dead. After that He ascended into heaven with great glory and power. So, likewise, as we have now come out of the world and entered into the tomb of repentance and humiliation by being assimilated to the sufferings of the Lord, He Himself comes down from heaven and enters into our body as into a tomb. He unites Himself to our souls and raises them up, though they were undoubtedly dead, and then grants to him who has thus been raised with Christ that he may see the glory of His mystical resurrection.

Christ's resurrection is thus our resurrection, ours who lie here below. He who has never fallen into sin, as it is written, nor lost anything whatever of His own glory, how will He ever be raised up or be glorified, since He is always glorified above all and remains the same, "far above all rule and authority"? As has been said, Christ's resurrection and His glory are our glory. Through His resurrection in us it comes into being in us, is shown to us, and is seen by us. Once He has appropriated what is ours, that which He works in us He attributes to Himself. The resurrection of the soul is union with life. The body is dead and cannot live or be called alive unless it receives the living soul in itself and is joined to it, though not mingled with it. Likewise the soul cannot live unless it is ineffably and without confusion united to God, who is truly the life eternal. Before this union in knowledge, vision, and perception it is dead, even though it is endowed with intellect and is by nature immortal. There is no knowledge without vision, nor vision without knowledge. This is what I want to say - there is vision, and in the vision there is knowledge and perception; but I say this about spiritual things, for in the physical realm there is perception even apart from vision.

What do I mean? A blind man who hits his foot against a stone feels it, but a dead man does not. But in spiritual things, unless the mind comes to the contemplation of the things that are above thought, it does not perceive the mystical activity. Those who have not arrived at contemplation in spiritual matters and claim that they perceive the things that are above intellect, word, and thought are like someone whose eyes are blinded and who has a sensation of good or bad things that he experiences, but does not know what is in his hands

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<sup>3</sup>The Discourses, Paulist Press CWS, 1980. cp.XIII 10,40-80.

or at his feet, even if they are for him a matter of life or death. Since he is deprived of the faculty and perception of vision he in no way perceives the bad or the good things that come upon him. Thus he will often lift up his staff to ward off his enemy and possibly strike his friend instead, while his enemy stands before his eyes and laughs at him.

Most people believe in the resurrection of Christ, but very few have a clear vision of it. Those who have no vision thereof cannot even adore Christ Jesus as the Holy One and as Lord.

**The sign of the resurrection addresses our faith and not our sight - A reading from a sermon by John Henry Newman.**<sup>4</sup>

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Our Lord expressly promises all Christians a certain gracious manifestation of himself, which it is natural, at first sight, to suppose a sensible one: and many persons understand it to be such, as if it were not more blessed to believe than to see. Our Lord says; AHe that has my commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves me; and he that loves me, shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him.@ When Jude asked him, ALord, how is it that you will manifest yourself unto us, and not unto the world?@ Our Lord answered, AIf one loves me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him (Jn14:21-23). In accordance with this promise, St Paul says, AThe Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God;@ and St John, AHe that believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself.@

Now, that this great gift, whatever it be, is of a nature to impart illumination, sanctity, and peace, to the soul to which it comes, far from disputing, I would earnestly maintain. And, in this indirect way, doubtless, it is in a certain sense apprehended and perceived; perceived in its effects, with a consciousness that those effects cannot come of themselves, but imply a gift from which they come, and a presence of which they are, as it were, the shadow, a voice of which they are the echo.

But there are persons who desire the inward manifestation of Christ to be much more sensible than this. They will not be contented without some sensible sign and direct evidence that God loves them; some assurance, in which faith has no part, that God has chosen them; and which may answer to their anticipations of what Scripture calls Athe secret of the Lord,@ and Athe hidden manna@ which Christ invites us to partake. Some, for instance, hold that their conscience would have no peace, unless they recollected the time when they were converted from darkness to light, from a state of wrath to the kingdom of God. Others consider that, in order to possess the seal of election, they must be able to discern in themselves certain feelings or frames of mind, a renunciation of their own merit, and an apprehension of gospel salvation; as if it were not enough to renounce ourselves and follow Christ, without the lively consciousness that we are doing so; and that in this lies Athe secret of the Lord.@ Others go further; and think that without a distinct inward assurance of his salvation, one is not in a saving state.

This is what men and women often conceive; not considering that whatever be the manifestation promised to Christians by our Lord, it is not likely to be more sensible and more intelligible than the great sign of his own Resurrection. Yet even that, like the miracle wrought upon Jonah, was in secret, and they who believed without seeing it were more blessed than those who saw.

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<sup>4</sup> *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987, pp. 1244-1245.

## A Reading from St. Augustine's SERMONS (Easter Sunday).<sup>5</sup>

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"O you who have been baptized, you who were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.' If light, then day; for God 'called the light Day.' You were darkness; He made you light; He made you the day; concerning you we now sing: 'This is the day which the Lord hath made: Let us be glad and rejoice therein.' Avoid darkness. Drunkenness leads to darkness. Do not depart sober and return intoxicated. We shall see you this afternoon. The Holy Spirit has begun to dwell in you; let Him not move out; do not shut Him out of your hearts. He, a good guest, found you empty; He is filling you. He found you hungry; He is feeding you. Finally, He found you thirsty; He is giving you to drink. Let Him inebriate you, for the Apostle says: 'Do not be drunk with wine, for in that is debauchery.' And, as if wishing to teach us how we ought to be inebriated, he adds: 'But be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing to one another in hymns and psalms and spiritual songs, singing in your hearts to the Lord.' Is not he who rejoices in the Lord and who sings praises to the Lord with great exultation like to an inebriated person? I approve of such inebriation, 'for with thee, O God, is the fountain of life; and thou shalt give them to drink of the torrent of thy pleasure.' Whence will this be? 'For with thee, O God, is the fountain of life; and in thy light we shall see light.' The Spirit of God is drink and light. If you would find the fountain in the darkness, you should enkindle a light, so that you might come to it. But do not enkindle a light at the fountain of light; He Himself will shine upon you; He will lead you to Himself. When you come to drink, approach and be enlightened. 'Come ye to him and be enlightened.' Do not depart, do not be enveloped in darkness. O Lord God, call them and let them approach Thee; strengthen them, lest they depart from Thee. Make Thy children new beings, make these newly baptized strong; but do not make dead of the old ones, for in this wisdom one may grow old, but one may not die.

Thus you have heard it proclaimed that Christ is the Lord, because 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God.' For, if the Lord Christ had not humbled Himself, but had wished to remain always as He was, then we would have perished.

We acknowledge the Word as God with God; we acknowledge that the only-begotten Son is equal to the Father; we recognize the Light from Light, Day from Day. He who made the day is the Day, not made, but begotten by the Day. If, then, Day is from Day, not made but begotten, what is the day which the Lord has made? Why is it day? Because it is light. 'And the Lord called the light Day.

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<sup>5</sup>The Fathers of the Church. Fathers of the Church Inc., 1959, pp. 193-194.

**A reading about the joy of Easter, from a sermon by Blessed Gueric of Igny. <sup>6</sup>**

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Now, my brethren, what witness to Christ's love does the joy of your hearts give you? I venture to judge, and rightly as you will see, that if you have ever loved Jesus alive or dead or risen from the dead, your heart rejoices within you. As the tidings of his resurrection resound and re-echo again and again through the Church you will say to yourselves: They have told me that Jesus my God is still alive. On hearing it my spirit, which was asleep through weariness, languishing through tepidity, disheartened through timidity, has revived. For the joyful voice of this happy message raises even from death those buried deep in sin. Otherwise, if Christ, coming up from hell, left them there in the depths, there would certainly be no hope for them; their fate would be buried in forgetfulness. By this token you may clearly know that your soul lives again fully in Christ if it echoes this sentiment: It is enough for me that Jesus is still alive.

How faithful and worthy of a friend of Jesus is that voice, how pure that act of love which says: It is enough for me that Jesus is still alive. If he lives, I live, for my spirit acts through his. Yes, he is my life, my all in all. For what can I lack if Jesus is still alive? Rather everything else may be taken from me, nothing else matters to me so long as he lives. If he wishes then, let him take no account of me. It is enough for me that he still lives even if he only lives for himself. When the love of Christ so absorbs all our affections that, unmindful and forgetful of ourselves, we have no feeling for anything but Jesus Christ and what pertains to him, then, I say, love has been made perfect in us. To one who so loves, poverty is no burden, no hurt is felt, insults are to be laughed at, misfortune disdained, and death considered as gain. In fact one does not think in terms of death knowing that death is a passage to life. And one can confidently assert: I will go and see him before I die.

Although, my brethren, we have not been endowed with such a great purity of conscience, let us, nevertheless, go to see Jesus journeying to the mountain of heavenly Galilee, where he awaits us. On the way our love will increase, and on our arrival, at least, it will be perfected. On the way, the road, at first hard and difficult, will grow easier, and the strength of the weak will increase. The flesh of Christ is our food for the journey, his Spirit our means of conveyance. He himself is the food, he himself is the chariot and charioteer of Israel. When you arrive, all the goods, not of Egypt but of heaven, will be yours. There, in the best place in the kingdom, at the bidding of Christ you will take your rest. Come to me all you that labor and are burdened with hunger, and I will refresh you. Come, you blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you. May he who calls you lead you to where he lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, through endless ages. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> *Liturgical Sermons* (CS 32), vol. 2, Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1971, pp. 84-85.

## He is Risen II. From a Book by Thomas Merton.<sup>7</sup>

The risen life is not easy; it is also a dying life. The presence of the Resurrection in our lives means the presence of the Cross, for we do not rise with Christ unless we also first die with him. It is by the Cross that we enter the dynamism of creative transformation, the dynamism of resurrection and renewal, the dynamism of love. The teaching of St. Paul is centered entirely on the Resurrection. How many Christians really understand what St. Paul is talking about when he tells us that we have "died to the Law" in order to rise with Christ? How many Christians dare to believe that whoever is risen with Christ enjoys the liberty of the sons and daughters of God and is not bound by the restrictions and taboos of human prejudice?

To be risen with Christ means not only that one has a **choice** and that one **may** live by a higher law - the law of grace and love - but that one **must** do so. The first obligation of the Christian is to maintain their freedom from all superstitions, all blind taboos and religious formalities, indeed from all empty forms of legalism. Read the Epistle to the Galatians again sometime. Read it in the light of the Church's summons to complete renewal.

The Christian must have the courage to follow Christ. The Christian who is risen in Christ must dare to be like Christ: one must dare to follow conscience even in unpopular causes. One must, if necessary, be able to disagree with the majority and make decisions one knows to be according to the Gospel and teaching of Christ, even when others do not understand why the person is acting this way.

"The followers of Christ are called by God not according to their accomplishments, but according to God's own purpose and grace." This statement from the Constitution on the Church of Vatican II effectively disposes of a Christian inferiority complex which makes people think that because they never have amounted to anything in the eyes of others, they can never amount to anything in the eyes of God. Here again we see another aspect of St. Paul's teaching on freedom. Too many Christians are not free because they submit to the domination of other people's ideas. They submit passively to the opinions of the crowd. For self-protection they hide in the crowd, and run along with the crowd - even when it turns into a lynch mob. They are afraid of the aloneness, the moral nakedness, which they feel apart from the crowd.

But the Christian in whom Christ is risen dares to think and act differently from the crowd. He has ideas of his own, not because he is arrogant, but because he has the humility to stand alone and pay attention to the purpose and the grace of God, which are often quite contrary to the purposes and the plans of an established human power

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<sup>7</sup>He is Risen. Thomas Merton. Argus Communications. 1975. p.18

structure. If we have risen with Christ then we must dare to stand by him in the loneliness of his Passion, when the entire establishment, both religious and civil, turned against him as a modern state would turn against a dangerous radical. In fact, there **were** "dangerous radicals" among the Apostles. If we study the trial and execution of Jesus we find that he was condemned on the charge that he was a revolutionary, a subversive radical, fighting for the overthrow of legitimate government. This was not true in the political sense. Jesus stood entirely outside of all Jewish politics, because his Kingdom was not of this world. And yet he was a "freedom fighter" in a different way. His death and resurrection were the culminating battle in his fight to liberate us from **all** forms of tyranny, **all** forms of domination by anything or anyone except the Spirit, the Law of Love, the "purpose and grace" of God.