

I Shall Not Die, But Live

I shall not die, but live, says the Lord. And you will proclaim my deeds to the world. Those words come from Psalm 118, Verse 17, but you won't find them in your Bibles. I have recast them. The psalmist speaks of having survived a victorious battle: "The right hand of the Lord has triumphed. I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord."

This morning I want us to imagine these words spoken by the Risen Lord, who stands before us and challenges us with this great commission: I shall not die, but live, and you will proclaim my deeds to the world.

Today is a day of proclamation, whether it be the baptisms that await us, or the shouts of Alleluia and The Lord is Risen heard in the Easter celebrations of our Orthodox brothers and sisters that began late last night and continued into the wee hours of this morning. Everywhere the Lord is proclaiming: I shall not die, but live. And his people are telling his deeds to the world.

Today is a day for proclamation, not introspection. Oftentimes with today's gospel, we are called to see ourselves in Thomas' journey from doubt to confession; and to see in Jesus' final benediction a reflection of our own faith: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

That means you and me, who have not seen the Risen Lord, but have been transformed by his Spirit to carry his word. This morning, the Risen Lord also says: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And after speaking these words there behind the locked doors of the upper room, he breathed on his disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit.

Christ lives by sending us out and empowering us with his Holy Spirit. How else can he live if not by our telling his story, living his story, bringing young and old into the new life of his story, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit? Today we celebrate that story because this is the day the Lord has made. God is doing something amazing among us. Yes, we are his obedient servants. We present the children. We take our vows, say our prayers, and collect photos on our I-phones. But all of this is God's doing. It is how we know our Easter proclamation is not merely a festal shout. It is a statement of spiritual truth.

The Lord is Risen! Sing, Alleluia! He lives and by our deeds he is known. Yet, it is not by deeds alone. Any group of good-hearted folk can feed the hungry, house the homeless, or fight for justice. We do these things because of his life-giving Spirit that dwells within us. The simple truth, brothers and sisters, is that without Jesus, the Church, his Body on earth, has no message, no reason to exist. Without his Spirit, we have no power.

"I am the vine," he said, "you are the branches. Apart from me you can do nothing."

Receive the Holy Spirit, he said to his disciples, just as he says to us. Be empowered to proclaim my deeds and the mighty acts of my God. Yes, yes, Lord, we might say. But how? What is it you would have us to do?

First, remember who you are and whose you are. In the first chapter of the Gospel According to John, the evangelist says the Word became flesh, that he came to his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to those who did receive him, 2,000 years ago in Palestine and in our own day and time, to them he

gave the right to become children of God, children born not of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or the will of man, but of God, and by faith in the one whom God sent.

Remember whose you are and continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship and in the breaking of the bread.

Remember, and persevere in resisting evil, whether it be in the world or in our own hearts.

Remember, and serve Christ in all persons, whether friend or foe, and our Lord knows this is a hard thing to do. How can we serve Christ in the life of John Earnest, a young man of 19, just a kid, who, it is said, walked into the Chabad of Poway, California, yesterday, armed with an AR-15 style assault rifle, and began to shoot and kill? How to serve Christ in him? Yet, that, too, is our bounden duty.

Remember and strive for justice and peace. Here again we face a tremendous challenge because we cannot escape from the world. As much as we may want to barricade ourselves from the hatred and howling madness around us, we cannot live in a holy bubble. After all, Jesus did say: As my Father as sent me, so I send you.

Day after day, Sunday after Sunday, we are gathered and sent, gathered and sent. Holy people fed by holy food.

And I wonder what smile would come upon the face of Thomas the disciple were he to know what has become of those blessed ones who have not seen, yet have believed. What joy would rise in his heart to know the call to mission is still being heard and answered?

Right now, Wayne and Linda Adamson are down in Guatemala, doing the Lord's work.

Right now, Amy Richter+ and Joe Pagano+ are bringing their immense knowledge and gift for teaching to the work God has given them to do in South Africa.

Right now, someone we do not know is giving a symbolic cup of cold water to a parched soul, and doing so in the name of Jesus Christ.

Today is a day for proclamation and not introspection. This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it, for though our Lord has died in the flesh, he is alive in the spirit, alive in our hearts, and alive in our world.

Amen

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