

EASTER DAY – YEAR A (2026)

What does it mean to say, as we shall do presently, ‘I believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead?’ What exactly do we believe about what happened between his burial, and the discovery of the empty tomb? And what difference might that make to our lives now, and in the future? First, we need to be clear about what the Church teaches about the Resurrection of Jesus because, even among faithful Christians, there abound many strange and erroneous ideas concerning what really happened on the first Easter Day. And so, it is important to note that no one actually witnessed the Resurrection itself: though Jesus’ female followers, and later his disciples, were granted to see the evidence of the Resurrection – the empty tomb – they were not permitted to see him rise from the dead: this was, and remains, a mystery. And yet, we know that the Resurrection really happened, because the risen Lord not only appeared many times to his disciples before his Ascension; but also, because, in time, many of them would give up their own lives to prove the truth of their experiences and faith. But the Resurrection was not a resuscitation: Jesus did not return, like those he had raised from the dead, to the life that he had lived before he died. No: his resurrected body had undergone a spiritual transformation, such that it was longer subject to our wants and limitations: it could pass through doors and disappear at will. The door of the tomb was opened, not to let the Lord out, but to let the women in. And, though not subject to the limitations

of our present life, the risen Lord could at will conform to them: he walked and spoke; he ate and drank. So, in the resurrection appearances, we receive a revelation of another life: a manner of existence of a higher order than our own. And this is entirely consonant with the pattern of Jesus' earthly life before his crucifixion: for, by the Incarnation – by the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us – God no longer instructed humanity through prophets and teachers about the meaning and purpose of human life; but, rather, himself entered into humanity, embodied the perfect human example, and disclosed the possibilities of human life on earth. So, also, Jesus did not simply teach the immortality of the human person; but, during the forty days between his Resurrection and Ascension, actually manifested something of the glory of our future life, by living it before us, insofar as earthly and temporal conditions allowed. And it is this new life in which, through baptism into Christ's death and Resurrection, we share: the new creation, begun in and through Jesus' rising from the dead, is not only our destiny, but the life we are called to live now. So, as we assent to the bodily Resurrection of the Son of God, we also profess our faith in our own, of which his is the pledge: for, after we are finally freed from the weakness and constraints of this mortal life, in God's good time, we shall possess bodies adapted for life under future conditions as our current bodies are for this life; and, although we shall be changed, we shall remain discernibly ourselves, albeit cleansed from our sins, and all that currently disfigures us, and separates us from

one another and from God. We can only apprehend this now in signs and figures, as the fulfilment of God's promises is yet undiscovered and unknown. But this is our destiny: so, what of tomorrow, next week, and the rest of our lives? What does Jesus' Resurrection mean for us now?

It feels like there are few reasons to celebrate at the moment: war, economic stagnation, and the continuing fragmentation of our society cause even the most optimistic at least a measure of anxiety. And then, on a personal level, worries about health, job security, and simply getting to the end of the week in one piece, overwhelm our thoughts and disturb our dreams, whilst leaving little room for contemplation of higher things. But, whether we think about it or not, whether we feel it or not, the objective and definitive change that the Resurrection brings about in our hearts is that it instils hope, and elicits joy. For, the hope and promise of the Resurrection give to Christians a joy that transcends our present circumstances and difficulties; and that joy cannot be self-generated or taken away. And this is no placebo or crutch; rather, it is a deep and lasting wellspring, sustaining us through good times and bad; enabling us to live less anxiously, and giving us courage to approach suffering, disappointment, and especially death itself with confidence, hope and trust. For, it is Resurrection joy that sets Christians apart: it comes from the conviction that Jesus has won the victory, and that sin and death do not have the last word; just as it is this infectious joy that acts as a conduit of faith to others – a witness without words.

Because, in the life of faith, joy and happiness are very different: happiness is a temporary emotion, a gladdening of the heart, and a raising of the spirit in response to something beautiful, pleasurable or good. In contrast, joy is a lasting, internal disposition that is not dependent on how we feel. Its source is God himself, and it has the power to transfigure even the most desperate situations with peace, grace and hope. And so, it is right that today should make us happy; but, more importantly, the Resurrection should bring us joy; because it is the bedrock upon which we build our lives; as it frees from the fear of what is to come, and gives us the confidence to tread the ways of this world more lightly, because we know that God is in control, and that we are safe in his hands.

Because of Easter, Christians have no reason to despair: of course, the sufferings, burdens and griefs of life are hard and cause us sadness, and, at times, to question and doubt. But, in the face of all that diminishes us, Resurrection faith proclaims new life; and, as we journey towards our promised eternal home, we must draw deeply from this inexhaustible well of grace, not only when things are going well, but especially when they're not. Because Easter joy is not a feeling: it is a state of being, and a determination to live this life to the full in the power of the Resurrection, and in union with Jesus Christ. And it is our calling, as those who share in his Resurrection by baptism, to defy our society's culture of death, deceit and darkness by choosing to follow the life, light and truth of Jesus Christ; because, without Jesus, there is no resurrection and life, no hope and no joy.