

The Resurrection of Our Lord: Easter Sunday

The complete Pascal Homily of St John Chrysostom is below Dave's sermon

Readings

Acts 10:34-43

Colossians 3:1-4

Matthew 28:1-10

Psalm 118

Collect

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

As one for whom finding the car keys in the morning is a major victory, here's what I love about Matthew's version of Easter morning: it is *absolute chaos*.

We've got an earthquake: Second one in three days.

We've got an angel: Descending like a bolt of lightning and then casually lounging on the stone he just rolled away.

We've got armed Roman guards: Professionals, mind you, trained to stand their ground against charging cavalry. They take one look at this lounging angel and *faint*. Just crumple. Done for the day.

And we've got two Marys: They're there too, but they're still standing.

Think about it: The soldiers had *armor* and *swords* and imperial *authority*, and they dropped. The women had nothing: no weapons, no status, no plan beyond bringing spices to a grave. They stayed on their feet.

That tells you something important about who's equipped for resurrection.

Because the first thing the angel says, before any theology, before any explanation — is "*Do not be afraid.*" And then Jesus shows up on the road and says the exact same thing. "*Do not be afraid.*"

The first word of the risen Christ to the world is not a doctrine.

It's not a requirement.

It's not a reproach.

Not a guilt thing like "Where have you been?" It's: *Don't be afraid.*

I think that matters

Because here's the thing about fear: it doesn't always look like fear.

Sometimes it looks like staying away.

Sometimes it looks like getting angry,

Sometimes it looks like busyness, or distraction, or that vague sense that whatever's happening inside a church probably isn't for you ... that you'd need to know more, or believe more, or have your life a little more together before you'd belong in a place like this.

And to all of that, all of us, the risen Jesus has a one-line answer.

Speaking of being afraid, our first reading this morning has Peter, standing in a stranger's living room. Cornelius is a Roman centurion, an experienced, respected veteran, commander of a century of fighting men. This guy was not Mr. Rogers. He wasn't a helper. He was a fighter.

He was someone Peter's entire . . . world told him was beyond the reach of God's welcome. And Peter opens his mouth and says something that clearly surprises him, much less his listeners: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality."

Have you ever opened your mouth to say one thing and been flabbergasted at the other thing that comes out? I can almost hear Peter thinking, *I can't believe I'm saying this*. Because Peter spent three years with Jesus and he's *still* catching up to how wide this Jesus thing is. The welcome of God keeps being bigger than the people who announce it expect.

That's the pattern of Easter. It is always wider than we think. It always invites people we'd rather skip. The first witnesses were women in a culture that didn't admit women's testimony in court. The first sermon to the Gentile world was preached by a man who had been so afraid that he lied about knowing Jesus to anyone who would listen.

So here is what I want to say on Easter morning, as simply as I can say it: the "do not be afraid" is for you. Not the theoretical you, not for the you who will show up once you've read enough or prayed enough or sorted yourself out enough some day

It's for the you who's here right now, with whatever you carried through those doors — doubt, curiosity, grief, habit, love for the someone who dragged you here, or just a faint, stubborn hope that death does not get the last word.

That hope is not faint at all. That hope is the earthquake.

Because the tomb is open. And the guards who thought they were in charge are face-down in the dirt. And the women? The ones with no credentials and no authority and no plan beyond the spices? They are *running with power*.w. Matthew says they ran out of there with "fear and great joy." Which is, honestly, the most accurate description of faith I've ever heard. You don't have to choose. You can have both. You can be terrified and elated in the same breath. That's not a contradiction. That's Easter.

And so we end where the Church has ended on this morning for sixteen centuries, with the words of John Chrysostom — words shouted, not whispered:

Christ is Risen, and you, O death, are annihilated! Christ is Risen, and the evil ones are cast down! Christ is Risen, and the angels rejoice! Christ is Risen, and life is liberated! Christ is Risen, and the tomb is emptied of its dead; for Christ having risen from the dead, is become the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. To Him be Glory and Power forever and ever. Amen!

The Pascal Homily of St John Chrysostom

In the very early years of its history, the Eastern Orthodox Church adopted the custom of using the Paschal sermon of St. John Chrysostom at the Paschal Vigil service held during the Saturday night before Easter morning. Chrysostom first proclaimed this sermon in the 400s as instructions to catechumens, new Christian converts, who were baptized during that vigil service.

The service itself is the high point of the year in Orthodox worship, and the Chrysostom sermon, proclaimed in every Orthodox church each year, is a high point of the service. It is presented enthusiastically and with flourish. Traditionally, the congregation joins the priest in saying the words, "Death was angered" and "Christ is risen!" as those are repeated again and again. The sermon is heard but once a year, but many know it by heart.

The Lord is risen.

He is risen indeed!

If there are devout and God-loving people here,

let them enjoy this beautiful, radiant festival.
If there are prudent servants,
enter joyously into the Lord's joy.
Whoever may be spent from fasting,
enjoy now your reward.
Whoever has toiled from the first hour,
receive today your just settlement.
If any came after the third hour,
celebrate gratefully.
If any of you arrived after the sixth,
have no misgivings, you have lost nothing.
If some have been as late as the ninth,
come forward, do not be at a loss.
If any of you have arrived only at the eleventh hour,
do not be dismayed for being late.
The Master is gracious;
He accepts the last even as the first;
He gives rest to those of the eleventh as well as to
those who have labored from the first;
He is lenient with the last while looking after the first;
to the one He gives, to the other He gives freely;
He accepts the labors and welcomes the effort;
honors the deed, but commends the intent.
So, all of you, enter into the joy of our Lord:
first and second, share the bounty.
Rich and poor alike, celebrate together.
Sober or heedless, honor the day.
Those who fasted, and those who did not, rejoice
today.
The table is full, everyone fare sumptuously.
The calf is fatted; no one go away hungry.
Everyone, savor the banquet of faith;
relish the riches of His goodness.
No one need lament poverty,
for the kingdom is seen as universal.
No one need grieve over sins;
forgiveness has dawned from the tomb.

No one need fear death;
the Savior's death has freed us from it.
While its captive He stifled it.
He despoiled Hades as He descended into it; it was angered when it tasted His
flesh.
Foreseeing this, Isaiah proclaimed: "Death," he
said, "was angered when he met You below."
Death was angered because it was abolished
Death was angered because it was mocked
Death was angered because it was slain.
Death was angered because it was shackled.
Death received a body and encountered God.
Death took earth and came face-to-face with heaven.
Death took what it saw and fell by what it could not see.
Death, where is your sting?
Hell, where is your victory?
Christ is risen and you are overthrown.
Christ is risen and demons have fallen.
Christ is risen and angels rejoice.
Christ is risen and life rules.
Christ is risen and not one dead remains in the tomb.
For Christ, having risen from the dead,
has become the first fruits of those that slept.
To Him be the glory and the dominion, forever. Amen.