

6<sup>th</sup> Sunday (C)

16<sup>th</sup> February 2025

'Nicene Creed v: Jesus's Death & Resurrection (CCC 571–682)'

Jer 17: *the man who puts his trust in man ... the man who puts his trust in the Lord*

Ps 1: *Happy the man who has placed his trust in the Lord*

1Cor 15: *Christ has in fact been raised from the dead*

Lk 6: 17, 20–26: *Blessed are you who weep now ...*

There's a beautiful ancient homily by Pope St Clement I in which he proposes that, far from being an unusual occurrence, the experience of death & resurrection is somewhat ubiquitous in human experience, even in the world of nature. He says:

*Consider how the Lord keeps reminding us of the resurrection that is to come ... Resurrection ... occurs at its appointed time. Day and night show us a resurrection; the night lies in sleep, day rises again; the day departs, night takes its place. Let us think about the harvest; how does the sowing take place, and in what manner? The sower goes out and casts each seed onto the ground. Dry and bare, they fall into the earth and decay. Then the greatness of the Lord's providence raises them up again from decay, and out of one many are produced and yield fruit.*

This broad idea of death & resurrection is also a constant theme through Sacred Scripture. So, for example, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Reading today, Jeremiah says that we are “*like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come,*” if we simply trust in the ways of the world; but that we are revived, “*our leaves remain[ing]*

*green, and ... not anxious in the year of drought*” when we return to full trust in the Lord. In the Gospel passage, St Luke's version of the Beatitudes, Our Lord reminds us that *though we weep, we will rejoice, though we are hungry we shall eat, though we are hated we shall be blessed*. In other words, that whatever evil we suffer, He will bring it about that we are restored. And St Paul in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading, towards the end of his masterly 1Corinthians, makes explicit reference to the death & resurrection of Jesus, the centre-piece of all human history, giving us hope that stretches beyond this mortal life: “*If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and ... If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep.*”

In like fashion, the Paschal Mystery takes centre stage in the Nicene Creed, whose text we are considering systematically in these early weeks of 2025, 17<sup>th</sup>-centenary year of the ground-breaking Council of Nicaea. (The *Catechism*, note, as it unpacks the faith expressed in the Creed, devotes *112 paragraphs* to this theme of Jesus's Death & Resurrection!) We recite the credal formula

weekly, perhaps by rote and without much attention to its deep significance; here are the words regarding His saving Death: “*For our sake He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, He suffered death and was buried.*”

The reasons for Jesus’s death, on a human and political level are very complex. They are tied up with the struggle for power between the Jewish religious authorities, and the oppressing Roman occupiers: the Jewish leaders could not risk upsetting the *status quo*, given their tenuous hold on government granted by the Romans; but on the other hand the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, couldn’t risk sedition and riots or else his own job would be ‘on the line.’ As the High Priest commented, “*It is better for one man to die for the people, than for the whole nation to perish*” — Jesus was a nuisance, and was getting too popular. They had no real evidence of any wrongdoing; in the end they brought false witnesses against Him in the Sanhedrin, and even those could not be consistent! The sort of accusations they brought against Him were (i) His claiming to be the

Messiah; (ii) His forgiving sins; (iii) His claiming to destroy the Temple and rebuild it; (iv) His breaking their strict interpretation of the Sabbath. Now, of course, if He were not the Son of God, then their opposition would have been justified, as He would truly have been a blasphemer, as they said. Ultimately it was on this basis that they wanted Him destroyed: His claim to be one with the Father as “the Son of the living God.” With Pilate, however, they play the card of “a new king” — the same worry that got Herod killing the innocent babies after Jesus’s birth. The Jewish leaders say to Pilate, duplicitously, as they accuse Jesus: “We have no king but Caesar.” Pilate will get His own back when He has inscribed above the Cross of Jesus, “The King of the Jews”!

But Jesus did not just die because it was politically useful to have Him out of the way; He died because when the Truth speaks — when the Son of God reveals Himself, the perfect man in a world of sin — then He will be opposed and rejected. There’s an astonishing passage in the book of Wisdom (2: 11–24) which speaks prophetically

of the virtuous man being despised and suffering simply because of his truth and goodness. This becomes most extreme when that virtuous man is the Son of God, perfect in all things and speaking what is true. Jesus died, that is, because of man's sinfulness. The blame for His death can't lie solely with those in Jerusalem in 30AD. He died, as His name implies, to save mankind from our sins: died as the *consequence* of man's sin, our rejection of the true God when He came amongst us. Therefore, He died as a result of all our wrongdoing, precisely to overcome and forgive that wrongdoing. This is why He uttered those words from the Cross that ring out across the ages, "*Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.*" In His body on the Cross, He reconciled God and man: remaining faithful to God the Father, *and* faithful to man: He didn't come down from the Cross, saving Himself the agony and bitter death. His perfect obedience meant that God and man were reunited. Jesus went right in to death, the consequence of our sin, so as to bring His life and light to that place farthest from the Father, and to save us from death.

The Nicene Creed goes on to profess, in the subsequent part of this article, that "*He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and His Kingdom will have no end.*" After death, in God's plan and with His grace, can always come resurrection; death never has the last word, in His sight. When one places all one's trust in the Lord — to do as He wishes, to accept the outcome of a moment of suffering in His divine embrace — we know that there can still be good news. Perhaps we are so familiar with the Gospel's *Good News*, that we find it hard to partake of the depths of emotion felt by Our Lady, the apostles, & other disciples like Mary Magdalene, who were with Our Lord in Jerusalem that Passover and witnessed the brutality of His Crucifixion. What could they do but *trust* in God ... and yet, which of them was barely even able to do that? Maybe they kept trying to repeat that prediction of His, "and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day He must rise again." But it was no part of their prior experience;

what could He have meant? Sense their unimaginable relief, then as news of His Resurrection on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day filters through. It is Sunday morning, still just about dawn; they have lived through a long desolate Saturday with the feelings of grief that Jesus was dead and buried. At first the stone is found rolled back by Mary Magdalene and the other women; then Peter and John go and inspect the empty tomb; then Our risen Lord appears Himself to Mary Magdalene, and gradually to others, including the Eleven apostles. The relief, and the joy, and the sense of enormity of this dawns on them: *Jesus has risen from the dead!* Never before had this happened; someone well and truly killed, dead and buried, had now risen in a new, and glorious way; truly alive yet surpassing the limits of His humanity. The only explanation for this was the one He had been giving again and again in His teaching: *He is the Son of the Living God.* Only He could have such power over life and death as to come back to us from the dead.

When we remember the little resurrections that happen in daily life: the joy of the sun rising on a new day;

the relief of the spring; the temperature rising after a long, cold winter; the rising of a loved one from a grief or setback or anxiety; all these lift our spirits each day and are signs to us of God's goodness. But *The Resurrection*, of Jesus from the Dead, is altogether something else. It is communal, profound, and lasting: it allows all of humanity to breathe a sigh of relief. It is humanity's knowing that the worry of sin and death, the burden of our failings, our frailty, *even our mortality*, does not need to keep us down. The Resurrection is the antidote to all those things; it is the medicine to heal those things; it is the joy of knowing that disaster no longer threatens us. We *could* ignore it, the Good News, stay locked in to our worldly concerns; but what human sense would that make, when Jesus is there to lift us up, raise us up out of our sins, and out of the grave? Let's be clear that what we're offering the world —our true faith in Jesus's victory, expressed in such simple words in the Creed, "*on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day He rose again in accordance with the Scriptures*" — we must *live* as believers really raised up by the Gospel, people of Easter joy!