

Easter Sunday
April 12, 2009
Fr. Tom Elliott

Resurrection, Not Resuscitation!

Acts 10:34a, 37-43
Psalm 118
Colossians 3:1-4
Mark 16:1-7

You only live once... or twice... or three times if you're Fr. Ralph Esposito. Many of you remember Fr. Ralph. He was the pastor of St. Michael Catholic Church in Van Buren, AR about ten years ago. During his time as pastor of that church, Fr. Ralph was diagnosed with esophageal cancer. He underwent radical surgeries and procedures to try to cure him and in the process he clinically died several times. Each time, he was resuscitated. Beating all odds, he is alive and well today.

Advanced technology and techniques today allow doctors and nurses to resuscitate patients on a shockingly regular basis. It is not uncommon to hear about a person who was given CPR and lived to tell about it. While such resuscitation is wonderful, it is not resurrection. This is very important for us to remember as we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus Christ this Easter. A Resurrected Christ is different than a resuscitated Jesus!

The difference between resurrection and resuscitation is somewhat subtle, but *very* important! The former consists of new life while the later is the continuation of a previous life. We see evidence of this in the life of Jesus Christ. While there is a link between His earthly life and His resurrected one, we see in Scripture a change—physically and vocationally. Despite the fact that Christ bore the marks of His crucifixion,¹ we know that enough had changed in His physical appearance that his very close friend, Mary, did not recognize Him at first.²

In addition to Christ's physical appearance being slightly different in His resurrected life, we know that His vocation changed as well. For the last three years of His life on earth, Jesus' ministry was focused on teaching His disciples about the Father's love.³ Ultimately, He came to give His life for our salvation.⁴ After His resurrection, however, Christ's ministry became one of intercession. In the letter to the Hebrews, we are told that Christ, "is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

These are just a couple of simple examples of how resurrection is new life and not simply an "old life" started up again. Because of this reality, we can confidently say that resurrected life is something deeper, something transformed and more profound than resuscitated life. That is not to say that our being spiritually resuscitated is a bad thing, but rather, God is calling us deeper today—into new life!

What does resurrected life mean for you and me today? Here are a few examples. For those people sitting in church today who have been struggling with addictions—resuscitated life

¹ John 20:24:28

² John 20:15-17

³ Mark 1:38

⁴ John 12:27

would consist of stopping the destructive behavior. Resurrected life, on the other hand, means allowing the Lord to take us into what truly needs to be healed—into the wound that lies beneath the addiction—so that we don't simply stop a behavior, but we start a new life!

For those of you who are struggling with your marriages right now, a resuscitated relationship would be one that gets back to the “way things were before,” while a resurrected life means both people choosing to live in a *whole new way*! Like the last example, resurrected life would mean more than just modifying some behaviors, but rather, allowing Christ to start something new!

One of the things that the Lord has been gently inviting me to think about more frequently is social justice. Father Ronald Rolheiser, in his book, *The Holy Longing*,⁵ gives a great parable that helps explain the difference between resurrected life and resuscitated life in the area of social justice. The parable begins with a small village located on a river. One day, the villagers see three bodies floating down the river. They pull the bodies out of the water and discovered that one of them was dead, another was injured, and the third was just a child. The townspeople gave the dead man a proper burial; they put the injured woman in the hospital and they placed the child in the care of a loving family.

The next week, a few more bodies floated down the river. Once again, the villagers took care of the bodies in the most appropriate way. Week after week, more bodies floated down the river and week after week the townspeople took care of them. Not once, however, did any of the townspeople leave their village and walk upstream to discover where the bodies were coming from.

When we look after the needs of the poor and the oppressed we participate in resuscitated social justice. As I mentioned earlier, this is not a bad thing, but it's not resurrection. If we want to bring the new life of Christ to social justice than we must look beyond people's immediate needs, to the source of poverty and injustice. Christ's Resurrection invites and begs us to be a resurrected people!

The busyness of our lives tempts us to put proverbial Band-Aids on the difficulties and struggles that arise in our lives. Our celebration of Easter today calls us to something far greater! Just as Christ was not simply resuscitated, but Resurrected, He desires for us to not simply get things back to the way they were before the difficulties and struggles began, but to have NEW LIFE! In His own words, “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10b).

Before any of you leave this Mass today, I want you to think of at least one area of your life where you have been hoping for resuscitation—hoping for it to return to the way it was before, when it was “better”—and I want you to quietly ask Christ for the grace of *resurrection* in that area. It might be an addiction or habitual sin, a broken relationship, a social justice issue, a prejudice, a fear, etc. Whatever it is, let's invite the grace and power of Christ's Resurrection into it that we might experience new life!

⁵ *The Holy Longing*, pg. 168