

Even though this is still the Easter season, as we step away from Easter day, there is a sense that we are returning to “regular” life. The glory of the resurrection doesn’t fill our imaginations as intensely as it did a few Sundays back. Instead of being the symphony which demands our focus, the resurrection fades to background music. It is still there providing a cohesive and consistent theme, but we are less keenly attentive to it as the days pass by, as the years pass by.

I am not sure it is worth asking whether or not this should be the case. The simple fact is that with time, the remembrance of our experiences fade and the emotions associated with them become less poignant. We should not beat ourselves up over this, but in acknowledging this tendency, we should rather institute those disciplines required to keep the resurrection at the core of our lives. The emotional pitch fades, but the atonement and the resurrection must ever remain our foundation. We are living in a time where we both see Jesus through the testimony of the Word and of the Church, and yet we don’t see Him either. He is with us and we stand resolutely upon this fact, and yet He has been taken from us.

Now of course the disciples experienced the greatest extreme of these emotional swings. “A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.” Jesus, in today’s gospel lesson, is talking of His upcoming death and resurrection. He would be taken from the disciples by His death on the cross, but then would return to them as the Resurrected Lord who had conquered death and sin. The desperate sorrow of the cross would be replaced by inconceivable joy.

Christ likens this range of emotions to that which a woman experiences due to childbirth – a very fitting analogy for us here on Mother’s Day. Her body is wracked with pain prior to the deliverance of the child. But then, once the child is born, once that new life has been brought into the world, everything changes. Birth is a miracle conceived when two people come

together so that by the power and grace of God, a new soul is created. A new person, tiny, defenseless, impotent, is brought into the world. This amazing miracle, in which human beings are instrumental in bringing to fruition, overshadows the pain of birth. In considering the scope of life, the pain last only for a moment. In the long term, we remember the joy.

But even that remembrance of the pain and the joy changes over time. Our children grow, and their struggles – which means our struggles – grow with them. The birth is just the beginning of the labor of raising a family. So in the birthing process we see the most acute and compressed version of the cycle of pain, or of loss and sorrow, which then leads to the fullness of joy. Our Lord Jesus Christ highlights the fact that birth of a child, because it is an extremely emotion-filled and physical event, becomes a particularly apt metaphor for growth in this life.

We each will experience many of these cycles on different scales of time in our lives. The overarching example represents our entire life. As we age, we will be faced with successive trials, times of distress, which we are called upon to overcome in faithfulness to Christ. Our lives are, as it were, one giant labor. We endure in the present trails, knowing that we will ultimately pass through death to be born into the joy of our renewed life in the presence of Christ. Our existence now is our time of purification. Through the struggles in this life, we are prepared for the joy of the life of the world to come.

So how does this metaphor, of suffering in birth in order to bring new life into the world, correspond with today's collect? As a reminder, it is found on page 173 of the BCP and reads:

ALMIGHTY God, who showest to them that are in error the light of thy truth, to the intent that they may return into the way of righteousness; Grant unto all those who are admitted into the fellowship of Christ's Religion, that they may avoid those things that are contrary to their profession, and follow all such things as are agreeable to the same;

What we are acknowledging here is the dire temptation to forget about the joy that awaits us and to only concentrate upon the sorrow of the current labor. We have all known individuals who have fallen away from the faith, who have lost sight of the prize that awaits for those who persevere to the end. I'm sure that even now, we know of some who are struggling, who are capitulating in the midst of the labor pains, who are toying with the near-term pleasures that sin offers and are blind to the great danger in which they have placed themselves.

Many were once faithful who are now in error. We should take two and a half lessons from them. First, let us pray with our collect, that the Holy Spirit proceeding by the witness of the Word proclaimed and by our loving testimony of the truth of Christ would woo them back from their error. We are our brothers' keepers. May God forbid that we would ever lose hope for those sheep who have strayed from the path.

Second, let us pray with our collect, that the Holy Spirit would keep the faithful from sin, and that He would keep those who have been baptized into the Church from apostasy. The corollary to this, our half point here of the two and a half, is that these prayers aren't just for the other guy. We ourselves must eschew the arrogance to which we are tempted, that we are somehow immune from apostasy. Pride cometh before the fall, and we are never more susceptible to falling away than when we think to ourselves, "Oh ... that isn't written to me, that is for so and so. I am beyond that." Let us not forget the Apostle Peter, who swore that he wouldn't deny Christ – that he would die with Jesus before he would deny Jesus. Oh how great was Peter's fall. Let us not presume that we are better than this great apostle who actually experienced the physical presence of Christ, who lived and walked and worked with the Incarnate Christ, and yet still turned away, denying that he even knew Jesus instead of merely admitting that he followed Him. Let us pray that in the time of trial, we would instead follow the example of Peter's ultimate martyrdom rather than his denial of our Lord.

Finally, let us just briefly touch on this morning's epistle which instructs us in how we are to live in this world as we suffer the birth-pangs as it were. It is important to note that the general epistles, of which St. Peter's are a part, are not written to a Church in comfort. They are written to a Church in distress, to a Church truly suffering real persecution. Therefore, we, who are tremendously comfortable by comparison, have no excuse not to follow the apostle's admonitions here, which are of two general categories. First, that we should remain sexually pure. Second that we should submit to the civil authorities set over us – and really we should understand these authorities to represent all rightly ordered authorities in our lives.

For the most part this morning, we leave this passage to your personal contemplation and study, but let it suffice for the present, that we, as followers of Jesus Christ, are to be paragon's of virtue and honor. We are to live with integrity, diligence, and humility. The lesson ends with this, "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king." As Americans, we do not get to beg-off that last imperative, but rather should read that as, "Honour the State."

I am afraid that we blow over these passages all too easily. We think that we are fine and secure and that, "of course we would never behave in such an ungodly way." It isn't that we consciously think this to ourselves, but therein lies the danger because we are unconscious that this is our operating assumption. And when we look around, we readily see the damage, the wreckage, left in the wake of our former brothers and sisters in Christ who at one time thought the same thing about themselves. It is extremely discouraging to the entire Body when someone turns away from Christ. It is true that those birth pangs we are called to endure sometimes lead to death instead of to the joy of new life.

So where does this leave us today? Well, let us not allow time or habit to blunt either our

awareness of our fallibility or our hope in Christ. Do not be lulled into arrogance that we are beyond the grasp of sin. Rather in humility, make St. Peter's admonition your personal motto. "Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the State." This is a daily endeavor into which we, the followers of Christ, must intentionally enter.

At the same time let us embrace the labor to which we are called, knowing that there is joy at the end. Our labor is not in vain. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things, such as Our Lord Jesus Christ, which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."

May God grant us grace, to avoid all those things that are contrary to our profession, and to diligently, wholeheartedly, joyfully, follow all such things as are agreeable to the same so that we would come into our eternal joy.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.