

## A Reading on Easter from the Book *The Eternal Year*, by Karl Rahner.<sup>1</sup>

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"Was crucified, died and was buried," we say, and to that we immediately add, "he descended into the lower regions and he rose from the dead." With this addition, "died" takes on a meaning entirely different from the notion of escaping from the world, the sense we are accustomed to give to death. Jesus himself said that he would descend into the heart of the world (Mt 12:40), into the heart of all earthly things where everything is linked together and is one, where death and futility hold sway in the midst of this consolidation. Down into death he has penetrated. He let himself be conquered by death - holy stratagem of eternal life - so that death would gulp him down into the innermost depths of the world. In this way, having descended to the very womb of the earth, to the radical unity of the world, he could give the earth his divine life forever.

Because he died, he belongs all the more to the earth. For when the body of a man is embedded in its grave of earth, the man (his soul, we say), even though in God's immediate presence after death, enters all the more into definitive unity with that one mysterious basis in which all spacial and temporal things are linked together, and the soul lives on, as from its root. By this death the Lord has descended into this lowest depth. Now he is there; futility and death are there no longer. In death he has become the heart of this earthly world, the divine heart in the innermost heart of the world.

Christ has risen from this one heart of all earthly things where realized unity and nothingness were no longer distinguishable. He has not risen for the purpose of departing once and for all from the heart of the world. He has not risen so that the travail of death which brings him forth anew might so bestow upon him God's life and light that he would leave behind him the dark womb of the earth, hopelessly barren. He has risen in his *body*. And this means that he has already begun to transform the world into himself. He has forever taken the world to himself; he is born anew as a child of this earth. But it is now an earth that is transfigured, an earth that is set free, that is untwisted, an earth that is established forever in him and that is forever redeemed from death and from futility. He rose, not to show that he had forsaken the grave of the earth, but to prove that he has definitively transformed even this grave of death -body and earth- into the glorious, immeasurable dwelling of the living God and the God-filled soul of the Son.

The risen Lord has not moved out from the earth's little hut. For, as a matter of fact, he still has his body -in a definitive and glorified state, yes, but still his body. It is a part of this earth that belongs to the earth forever as a share of its reality and destiny. He has risen in order to reveal that through his death the life of freedom and of bliss remains forever rooted in earth's narrow confines and in its grief, in the very center of its heart.

What we call his resurrection -and unthinkingly take to be his own private destiny- is only the first surface indication that all reality, behind what we usually call experience, has already changed in the really decisive depth of things. His resurrection is like the first eruption of a volcano which shows that God's fire already burns in the innermost depths of the earth, and that everything shall be brought to a holy glow in his light. He rose to show that this has already begun. The new creation has already started, the new power of a transfigured earth is already being formed from the world's innermost heart, into which Christ descended by dying. Futility, sin and death are already conquered in the innermost realm of all reality, and only the "little while" (which we call history) is needed until what has actually already happened appears everywhere in glory, and not only in the body of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup>*The Eternal Year*, Karl Rahner, Baltimore: Helicon Press 1964. pp.90-92.

## **A Discourse on Christ's Resurrection, by Symeon the New Theologian.<sup>2</sup>**

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Already Easter, that joyful day, that day of all gladness and delight, the day of Christ's resurrection, has arrived in the circle of the year. But rather, it happens daily and eternally in those who know its mystery, and so has filled our hearts with unspeakable joy and gladness.

Let us look and carefully examine what is the mystery of that resurrection of Christ our God which takes place mystically in us at all times, if we are willing, and how Christ is buried in us as in a tomb and how He unites Himself to our souls and rises again, and raises us with Himself. Such is the aim of our discourse.

Christ our God was hanged on the cross and nailed on it the sin of the world. He tasted death and went down to the uttermost depths of hell. Again, He returned from hell into His own spotless body, from which He had in no way been separated as He descended thither, and forthwith He arose from the dead. After that He ascended into heaven with great glory and power. So, likewise, as we have now come out of the world and entered into the tomb of repentance and humiliation by being assimilated to the sufferings of the Lord, He Himself comes down from heaven and enters into our body as into a tomb. He unites Himself to our souls and raises them up, though they were undoubtedly dead, and then grants to him who has thus been raised with Christ that he may see the glory of His mystical resurrection.

Christ's resurrection is thus our resurrection, ours who lie here below. He who has never fallen into sin, as it is written, nor lost anything whatever of His own glory, how will He ever be raised up or be glorified, since He is always glorified above all and remains the same, "far above all rule and authority"? As has been said, Christ's resurrection and His glory are our glory. Through His resurrection in us it comes into being in us, is shown to us, and is seen by us. Once He has appropriated what is ours, that which He works in us He attributes to Himself. The resurrection of the soul is union with life. The body is dead and cannot live or be called alive unless it receives the living soul in itself and is joined to it, though not mingled with it. Likewise the soul cannot live unless it is ineffably and without confusion united to God, who is truly the life eternal. Before this union in knowledge, vision, and perception it is dead, even though it is endowed with intellect and is by nature immortal. There is no knowledge without vision, nor vision without knowledge. This is what I want to say - there is vision, and in the vision there is knowledge and perception; but I say this about spiritual things, for in the physical realm there is perception even apart from vision.

What do I mean? A blind man who hits his foot against a stone feels it, but a dead man does not. But in spiritual things, unless the mind comes to the contemplation of the things that are above thought, it does not perceive the mystical activity. Those who have not arrived at contemplation in spiritual matters and claim that they perceive the things that are above intellect, word, and thought are like someone whose eyes are blinded and who has a sensation of good or bad things that he experiences, but does not know what is in his hands or at his feet, even if they are for him a matter of life or death. Since he is deprived of the faculty and perception of vision he in no way perceives the bad or the good things that come upon him. Thus he will often lift up his staff to ward off his enemy and possibly strike his friend instead, while his enemy stands before his eyes and laughs at him.

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<sup>2</sup>The Discourses, Paulist Press CWS, 1980. cp.XIII 10,40-80.

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Most people believe in the resurrection of Christ, but very few have a clear vision of it. Those who have no vision thereof cannot even adore Christ Jesus as the Holy One and as Lord. As it is written, "No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit", and, elsewhere, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth". That most sacred formula which is daily on our lips does not say, "Having believed in 'Christ's resurrection," but, "Having beheld Christ's resurrection, let us worship the Holy One, the Lord Jesus, who alone is without sin." How then does the Holy Spirit urge us to say, "Having beheld Christ's resurrection," which we have not seen, as though we had seen it, when Christ has risen once for all a thousand years ago, and even then without anybody's seeing it? Surely Holy Scripture does not wish us to lie! Rather, it urges us to speak the truth, that the resurrection of Christ takes place in each of us who believes, and that not once, but every hour, so to speak, when Christ the Master arises in us, resplendent in array and flashing with the lightnings of incorruption and Deity. For the light-bringing coming of the Spirit shows forth to us, as in early morning, the Master's resurrection, or, rather, it grants us to see the Risen One Himself. Therefore we say, "The Lord is God, and He has given us light" and we allude to His second Coming and add these words, "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord". Those to whom Christ has given light as He has risen, to them He has appeared spiritually, He has been shown to their spiritual eyes. When this happens to us through the Spirit He raises us up from the dead and gives us life. He grants us to see Him, who is immortal and indestructible. More than that, He grants clearly to know Him who raises us up and glorifies us with Himself, as all the divine Scripture testifies.

These, then, are the divine mysteries of Christians. This is the hidden power of our faith, which unbelievers, or those who believe with difficulty, or rather believe in part, do not see nor are able at all to see. Unbelievers, those who believe with difficulty, or believe in part, are those who do not show their faith through works. Apart from works the demons also believe and confess Christ to be God and Master. "We know who you are", they say, "you are the Son of God", and elsewhere, "These men are the servants of the Most High God". Yet such faith will not benefit the demons, nor even humans. This faith is of no use, for it is dead, as says the divine apostle, "Faith apart from works is dead", just like works without faith. How is it dead? Because it has not in itself God who gives life. It has not laid hold of Him who said, "He who loves Me will keep My commandments, and I and the Father will come and make Our home with him, so that by His coming He may raise from the dead him who has attained faith and give him life, and grant him to see Him who has risen in him and who has raised him up. For this reason such faith is dead, or, rather, they are dead who have faith apart from works. Faith in God is always alive, and since it is living it gives life to those who come with a good intention and receive it. Even before they have practiced the commandments it has brought many out of death into life and has shown them Christ our God. Had they persevered in His commandments and kept them until death they too would have been preserved by them - that is, in the state to which faith alone had brought them. But since they "turned aside like a bent bow" and speared themselves on their former actions, they inevitably at once made shipwreck of their faith and miserably deprived themselves of the true riches, who is Christ our God. So I urge you. let us keep God's commandments with all our might, so that we may not share in their fate, but enjoy both present and future blessings, that is, the very vision of Christ. To this may we all attain through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup>The Discourses, Paulist Press CWS, 1980. cp. XIII 90-160

## **The Holy and Saving Pascha, by St. Gregory of Nyssa.<sup>4</sup>**

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Let us consider the prophecy which says, "This is the day which the Lord has made". In it there is no hard or laborious work, but happiness and joy and gladness, as the word puts it, "Let us rejoice and be glad in it." What kind commands! What sweet legislation! Who postpones obedience to such commands? Who does not reckon the slightest delay in the commands as loss? Joy is the task, gladness the injunction, and by these the condemnation for sin is lifted and sorrows are transformed into happiness. That is what the wise saying means, "In the day of gladness ills are not remembered". This day brought the forgetting of the previous sentence against us, or rather its annulment, not just forgetting; it destroyed every single trace of our condemnation. Our child-bearing once brought pains, our birth now is free from labour. Once we were born as flesh from flesh, now what is born is spirit from spirit. Once we were born children of men, now as children of God. Once we were dismissed from heaven to earth, now the Heavenly One has made us heavenly. Once death reigned through sin, now justice has taken over power through life. There was one once who opened the way into death, and there is one now through whom life is introduced instead. Once through death we fell away from life, now it is by life that death is destroyed. Once for shame we hid behind the fig tree, now for glory we approach the tree of life. Once for disobedience we were evicted from the garden, now for faith we come within the garden, Again the fruit of life lies open to our grasp for our enjoyment. Again the garden fountain, dividing fourfold in gospel rivers, waters all the face of the church, so that the furrows of our souls, which the sower of the word cut with the plough of teaching, are cheered with drinking, and the harvest of virtue abounds.

What then remains for such as us to do? What but to imitate prophetic hills and mountains in their leaping? "The mountains", it says, "leaped like rams, and the hills like young lambs." Let us say, "The Lord is a great God", and "a great king over all the earth" is he who "has blessed the crown of the year with his goodness" and gathered us into this spiritual choir, Christ Jesus our Lord, to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

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<sup>4</sup>The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa. Ed. by Andreas Spira and Christoph Klock. Patristic Monograph Series, No.9, 1981. p.51

**A Reading from St. Augustine's SERMONS (Easter Sunday).<sup>5</sup>**

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"O you who have been baptized, you who were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.' If light, then day; for God 'called the light Day.' You were darkness; He made you light; He made you the day; concerning you we now sing: 'This is the day which the Lord hath made: Let us be glad and rejoice therein.' Avoid darkness. Drunkenness leads to darkness. Do not depart sober and return intoxicated. We shall see you this afternoon. The Holy Spirit has begun to dwell in you; let Him not move out; do not shut Him out of your hearts. He, a good guest, found you empty; He is filling you. He found you hungry; He is feeding you. Finally, He found you thirsty; He is giving you to drink. Let Him inebriate you, for the Apostle says: 'Do not be drunk with wine, for in that is debauchery.' And, as if wishing to teach us how we ought to be inebriated, he adds: 'But be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing to one another in hymns and psalms and spiritual songs, singing in your hearts to the Lord.' Is not he who rejoices in the Lord and who sings praises to the Lord with great exultation like to an inebriated person? I approve of such inebriation, 'for with thee, O God, is the fountain of life; and thou shalt give them to drink of the torrent of thy pleasure.' Whence will this be? 'For with thee, O God, is the fountain of life; and in thy light we shall see light.' The Spirit of God is drink and light. If you would find the fountain in the darkness, you should enkindle a light, so that you might come to it. But do not enkindle a light at the fountain of light; He Himself will shine upon you; He will lead you to Himself. When you come to drink, approach and be enlightened. 'Come ye to him and be enlightened.' Do not depart, do not be enveloped in darkness. O Lord God, call them and let them approach Thee; strengthen them, lest they depart from Thee. Make Thy children new beings, make these newly baptized strong; but do not make dead of the old ones, for in this wisdom one may grow old, but one may not die.

Thus you have heard it proclaimed that Christ is the Lord, because 'in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God.' For, if the Lord Christ had not humbled Himself, but had wished to remain always as He was, then we would have perished. We acknowledge the Word as God with God; we acknowledge that the only-begotten Son is equal to the Father; we recognize the Light from Light, Day from Day. He who made the day is the Day, not made, but begotten by the Day. If, then, Day is from Day, not made but begotten, what is the day which the Lord has made? Why is it day? Because it is light. 'And the Lord called the light Day.

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<sup>5</sup>The Fathers of the Church. Fathers of the Church Inc., 1959, pp. 193-194.

**On Loving Christ. From an Easter Sermon of St. Augustine**<sup>6</sup>

Appearing to his disciples after the Resurrection, Our Lord put a question to the Apostle Peter, prompting him who had denied him three times out of fear to make a threefold profession of his love. Christ rose bodily from the dead, Peter was raised spiritually. Christ our Lord rose from the dead, and by his love raised Peter. What advantage was it to Christ to be loved by Peter? When Christ loves you, you are the gainer, not Christ. And when you love Christ, again you stand to gain, not Christ. Wishing to teach all peoples how they can prove their love for him, Christ our Lord made it plain that this is best proved by their concern for his sheep. "Do you love me" Lord, you know that I love you. Feed my sheep." This happened not once, but a second and third time. Our Lord asked only, "Do you love me?" He received no other answer than, "You know that I love you." He gave no other charge to Peter than "Feed my sheep". If we love one another then we also love Christ. For Christ, God from all eternity, was born of a human in the course of time. As human born of human He appeared as human to humankind. As God in the form of human He worked many miracles. As human He suffered many wrongs at the hands of humans. As God in the form of human He arose from the dead. As human among humans He tarried on earth forty days. As God in the form of human He ascended into heaven before their eyes, and now is seated at the right hand of the Father. All this we fully believe, although we do not see it. Neither do we see Christ whom we are commanded to love, and yet each one of us cries out out avowal: I love Christ! "If you do not love your brother or sister whom you see, how can you love God whom you do not see?" In loving the sheep we prove that we love the Shepherd, for the sheep are in truth the very members of the Shepherd. In order that the sheep might be his members, He deigned to become the Lamb of God. In order that the sheep might be his members, "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter." In order that the sheep might be his members, it was said of him, "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world." But what tremendous strength there is in this Lamb. Would you like to know when strength was made manifest in this Lamb? Well, the Lamb was crucified and the lion was overcome. Consider and reflect with what power the world is ruled by Christ our Lord who vanquished the devil by his death.

Let us, then, give him our love, and let nothing be dearer to us than He. Or do you think that our Lord is not questioning us? Do you imagine that Peter alone deserved to be questioned, and not ourselves? Whenever this lesson is read, the heart of each and every Christian is being scrutinized. Therefore, whenever you hear the Lord saying, "Peter, do you love me?" visualize a mirror and examine your own reflection. For what else was Peter but a symbol of the Church? Hence when the Lord questioned Peter, He was questioning us.

In temptations, in toil, in weariness, in troubles, in miseries, in sorrows, may the love of Christ which we love in you, the love of Christ which you also love in us, lead us to that place where toil will be no more; nor misery, nor sighs, nor moans, nor vexation, where there will be neither birth nor death, where no one need dread the divine

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<sup>6</sup> Selected Easter Sermons of Saint Augustine. Commentary by Philip T. Weller. B. Herder Book Co. St. Louis, MO. 1959. p. 169.

wrath, but find all delight in gazing upon the face of the Almighty.



## The Meaning of the Alleluia in Eastertide. From a Sermon by St. Augustine.<sup>7</sup>

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Since it is the will of our Lord that we should see you during the time the **Alleluia** is sung, we feel that we ought to say a word to you about the **Alleluia**. I trust I shall not bore you by reminding you of something you already know, for we delight in singing the **alleluia** every day. As you know, **Alleluia** in our language means "praise the Lord." By this word we encourage one another to praise the Lord with one voice and one heart. Only that person can rightfully praise Him who is free from all that could displease Him. During this time of our earthly pilgrimage we sing the **Alleluia** for our solace on the journey. Now the **Alleluia** is our pilgrim's song on the way to the resting place of our true country, where all our striving must be left behind and only the song of **Alleluia** will endure.

What great happiness the virtue of hope engenders in us! But what will the realization itself be like? We hunger and we thirst and it is necessary that we have our fill. Yet now on the pilgrimage there is famine and only in the heavenly home will there be plenty. When, then, are we to be satisfied? "I shall be satisfied when your glory shall appear." But now the glory of our God, the glory of our Christ is hidden, and along with it our glory, too, lies concealed. But "when Christ shall appear, who is your life, then you also shall appear with him in glory." Then the **Alleluia** will be a thing of reality; now it is simply a matter of hope. Now it is hope that sings **Alleluia**, and love also, of course. Then it will be love, too, that will sing **Alleluia**, however a love that will know fulfillment, whereas now it is a love that remains unsatisfied.

What is the **Alleluia**, my brothers and sisters? I have already told you that it is the praise of God. Now when you hear the word, you take delight in its very sound, and in this delight you are already rendering homage. If now you love the drop of dew, how much more will you love the rushing fountain itself? If faith now prompts us to render praise, how much more will the vision of the reality intensify our praise?

Since in the life to come we shall lack nothing, for that very reason we shall be happy. We shall be fully satisfied - but with God. He will take the place of all that we so ardently desired here on earth. Do you now have a craving for food? God will be your food in the life to come. Do you now yearn for fleshly caresses? "But it is good for me to adhere to my God." Is your heart set on riches here? How will it be possible for you to lack anything when you are going to possess Him who is the Creator of everything? To strengthen your assurance, let me quote the words of the apostle, who says of the future life: "That God may be all in all."

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<sup>7</sup> Selected Easter Sermons of Saint Augustine. Commentary by Philip T. Weller. B. Herder Book Co. St. Louis, MO. 1959. p. 127.