

CHAPTER FIVE

The Plunder Divided

Easter to Pentecost



YOU HAVE BEEN RAISED TO LIFE WITH CHRIST
It was Christ's will that his body should be mortal up to the time of his resurrection, so that we who believe in him might know for certain that, as his members, we too can be victorious over suffering and death. We share his divine nature, and therefore we also share his victory and glory. All of us who believe in Christ and are born again in the Holy Spirit form a single community in Christ's sufferings and in his risen life. We do not celebrate the paschal mystery with the old yeast of sin and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of purity and truth (1 Cor 5:8), no longer living as members of the first Adam but as members of the body of Christ. If we really believe in our hearts what we profess with our lips, then not only has Christ died and been raised to life for us, but in him we too have been crucified, in him we have died and have been buried, and on the third day we have been raised to life again. St. Paul explains this clearly to the Colossians. "When you were buried with him in baptism,"

he said, “you were also raised with him *through faith in the active power of God* who raised him from the dead” (Col 2:12, emphasis added). And since we have a new life, St. Paul goes on to tell us how we must live from now on. “So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory” (Col 3:1-4).

The Lord knows how impossible it is for us to set our inconstant hearts on the things that are in heaven, or to keep our minds fixed on things there rather than on things here below. We can only do it if he himself lives in us by his Spirit. However, we have his solemn pledge in the Gospel: “Remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mt 28:20). It is a promise contained in the very name he was given by the prophet Isaiah: Immanuel, God-with-us. Jesus is true to his name; though he has ascended to heaven, he has not forsaken his adopted brothers and sisters on earth. He is with us still. He who has taken his place at the Father’s side is the same Lord who is the head of that body of which we are all members. In him we find strength to endure suffering here on earth, and in him we shall receive our share of glory in heaven.

With a promise like this, what need is there either to seek empty pleasures apart from the Lord or to give way to cowardice under trials? There will be plenty of pressures from the world to entice us, and there will be plenty of hardships to endure, but the earth is full of the Lord’s mercy. Wherever we are, Christ’s victory is always available to us.

“But take courage,” he told his disciples, “I have conquered the world” (Jn 16:33). He speaks the same word of life to each of his members today, telling us not to fear because he who has conquered the powers of darkness is alive in us as the light of the world. It is always Easter for us as long as we hold fast to our faith in him and reject all attachment to sin.



CHRIST, OUR PASSOVER,
HAS BEEN SACRIFICED

In Genesis we read about the cherub with the flaming sword who was posted at the entrance of the Garden of Eden to keep Adam and Eve from taking the fruit of the tree of life (Gn 3:24). Until Christ's precious blood quenched the flames of that sword, humans were shut out of their heavenly country. But now the Lord's people are invited to enter into paradise and enjoy its treasures. Everyone who is reborn is able to return to the lost country by taking the road which Jesus has opened up, a road which can only be closed to people in the future through their own fault.

Once we were ignorant of God; our lives were dark and despairing. But in his great mercy we have now been adopted as God's children and incorporated into the people whom he chose long ago. Our present task is to shake off our lethargy and reach out for the gifts he has promised us. When we think of the wretched state of bondage from which the Lord has rescued us, the price he paid for our salvation and the mighty power with which he set us free, our response can only be to praise and worship him with all our hearts and to glorify him who has given us a share in his

own risen life. Our whole lives from now on should bear witness to him. People should be able to see that he lives in us by the way we live. “See how these Christians love one another” is still the mark by which we testify to the risen Lord—this, and our freedom from worldly ambition and sinful habits. Loving service and shining purity are like two wings by which the Lord can raise us up from earth to heaven. But we have to seek these wings from him and ask for them in faith, recognizing that they are his gift, that his Spirit alone is the wind that empowers them, and that the glory is all his.

By faith we enter into the secret of the Easter mystery. The destroying angel cannot cross our threshold, because our doorposts are marked with the blood of the Lamb and the sign of the cross. We need not fear the plagues of Egypt; we have seen our enemies drown in the waters by which we ourselves have been saved. Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed. Our bodies and souls have been cleansed and purified; if we follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, no temptation will be able to separate us from the love of Christ who has brought peace to the whole world by his blood, and who, in returning to his glorious home at the Father’s side, has not forsaken his humble servants here on earth.

Now that the Lord has done this wonderful thing for us, we can no longer live for ourselves. Our lives must be wholly given over to him who died for us and rose again (2 Cor 5:15). Our old life is behind us; we are given a new life as members of Christ’s risen body. But this life still has to grow; it cannot be stationary. Anyone who is not moving forward is bound to slip back. If we are not gaining ground we

are losing it. Not only must we walk in the Spirit, we must run toward the Lord in faith and trust, celebrating the day of our redemption always in our hearts, his life within us bearing fruit in service and love.

What a price the Lord has paid for us, how tremendous the mystery by which we have been snatched from the powers of darkness! We must take every care not to let the old enemy deceive us again. Satan will do his best to prevent our receiving the eternal life Jesus has won for us, but we must be quite clear from the outset about the source of any doubts arising in our minds against the Christian faith, any suggestions contrary to God's commandments. They are the devil's efforts to bring us into captivity once more. All of us, then, who have been born again in water and the Holy Spirit, must remember the promises we made at our baptism and renewed on Easter night: we solemnly renounced Satan and threw off his yoke, and gave our whole lives to the Lord.



WE ARE ALREADY IN POSSESSION OF WHAT WE BELIEVE

During Lent our aim was to experience some share in the sufferings of the cross and to enter into the mystery of the Lord's passion by taking up our cross and following him along the way of his humiliation and endurance. Now, during Eastertide, the accent is on sharing his resurrection. Not for any merit of our own, but through the blood of Christ and the free gift of God's grace, we have been healed and set free. What the Lord asks of us now is not to try to earn this freedom, but to hold fast to what he has already given us and to guard it from the

devil's envy. In the Lord Jesus we have passed over from death to life, but while we are still on earth his Passover must be continually renewed in us. We have to be dead to Satan and alive to God; we have to abandon sin in order to rise to holiness. Jesus himself said: "No slave can serve two masters" (Lk 16:13). Our business is to make sure that the master we serve is the Lord who has raised up fallen people to glory, not the one who brought upright people to ruin.

St. Paul tells us that "the first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have been the image of the man of dust, so we will also bear the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor 15:47-49).

Praise God for this wonderful exchange, by which we are transferred from earthly disrepute to heavenly honor! In his great mercy the Lord descended to our level in order to lift us up to his, by taking on himself not only our human weakness but also our sins, and allowing himself, God though he was, to be assailed by all the sufferings which are the lot of mortal humans.

It was his will to die for us, but death could not keep him. The body that was laid in the tomb and the soul that descended to the world of the departed were the body and soul of the Son of God. Through his own will they were separated when he bowed his head on the cross and gave up his spirit; through his divine power they were reunited on the third day. The Gospels tell us of the rolling away of the stone, the empty tomb, the linen cloths, the angel witnesses, and the Lord's appearances to the women and to the apostles. All

this evidence formed the basis for the preaching of the faith throughout the whole world. Not only did Jesus speak with his disciples, but he ate with them, allowing them to touch him and to probe his wounds. He entered the upper room where the doors were shut and greeted them with the words “Peace be with you”—peace to quiet their troubled hearts and to assure them of the unfailing constancy of his love and forgiveness. To bring God’s love and forgiveness to the world had been his mission from the Father; now he passed on that mission to his apostles. “As the Father has sent me,” he told them, “so I send you. Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (Jn 20:21-23). Patiently he went through the Scriptures with them to show them everything that had been written about him in the Old Testament, how it had been ordained from the beginning that the Messiah should suffer and so enter into his glory. After this he showed them the wound in his side and the marks of the nails. By his own choice he had retained these scars in his body in order to heal the wounds of their unbelieving minds. Now they knew with absolute certainty that the risen body, radiantly alive in their midst, was the same body that had been born in Bethlehem and had suffered on the cross. From now on it would be seated with God the Father on his heavenly throne.

But after the resurrection Jesus’ body possessed a new quality, a new mode of being. Before Calvary it had been vulnerable, capable of suffering and death; now it was immune to pain, immortal and incorruptible. And in his glorified flesh we see the beginning of what we ourselves have been promised. Since we have been incorporated into

him we are not, as it were, hanging in suspense, wondering if we shall win through to our own resurrection; instead we rejoice and thank God for the elevation of our own human nature in Jesus, because we are already in possession of what we believe.

Our resurrection has already begun

To share Christ's resurrection means not to be shackled by temporal things but to set our hearts on the eternal life he is offering us here and now. It is true that at present we are only saved "by hope" (Rom 8:24). Our flesh is still mortal and corruptible as long as we are on this earth, yet we can stop living "according to the flesh" if we refuse to allow our natural appetites to rule us. St. Paul tells us to "make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Rom 13:14). By this he does not mean that we have to deny our bodies what their health and well-being require. "No one ever hates his own body" (Eph 5:29). But we must now take care of our bodies for the sake of serving the Lord, not for the sake of indulging ourselves. We are a new creation in Christ Jesus, and we must at all times be clear in our minds who it is who has made our nature his own and who has given us a share in his nature. Christ has made us his members, and we have acknowledged him as our Lord and Savior. Now that we have begun to live a new life in him, let us take care not to return to our former useless existence. We have put our hands to the plow; we must not give up or look nostalgically at what we have left behind, but keep our attention on what we are sowing. It would be the greatest tragedy to fall back again into the hopelessness from which the Lord Jesus has raised us up. We may still be afflicted with bodily infirmities, but we believe