

Joining with Christ **The Resurrection of the Lord** (Easter Sunday/A) April 20, 2014
9:00 AM Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Col 3:1-4; Jn 20:1-9 (There is no possible hardship that we can endure greater than crucifixion, so there is no evil that we suffer that God cannot redeem.)

“If Christ be not raising from the dead, our faith is in vain,” wrote St. Paul.

Indeed, the central importance of the resurrection of Christ is beyond dispute among believers. What is not beyond dispute is why: Why did Jesus offer his life on the Cross? Most attempts to answer this question over the ages have involved describing some form or other of the effects of his death and resurrection. Some of the effects are reconciliation between God and the human race, forgiveness of sins, new life for believers, heightened awareness of God’s love, and so on. All these are true, but they do not answer why God desired that Jesus, the divine Son embodied, give his life on a cross? Theories that Jesus’ death was necessary as a punishment for sin founder by placing a requirement or need on God. God has no needs. This may appeal to people who think that fathers should be strict and demanding, but it doesn’t explain why God must be strict or demanding. In fact, God did not have to create and did not have to redeem. So **why redemption and why this kind of redemption?**

If we look to Jesus’ own teachings about God, we find some clues to the reason why he offered his life for the salvation of the world, and why it matters. **Jesus’ life was life-giving** in many ways. His teachings lifted up people by impressing them with their own inherent dignity. His works brought healing to wounded bodies and souls. But most importantly, **he connected people with the heart of his heavenly Father**, a heart wounded by human wickedness and indifference, and yet desirous of relationship and communion with all people regardless of their past actions, ethnic origins, or social status. This view of God was revolutionary. It was even offensive to many sincere people who firmly believed God to be a demanding father requiring a very orderly life and having a narrow ethnic preference, that is, for the chosen people. **Jesus’ display of supernatural power and miraculous healings under circumstances that disregarded the Law** was more than disturbing. It **threatened the very authority of traditional religion**. This explains why there was hostility toward Jesus, but not why he chose to surrender to it.

The central theme of Jesus' whole life was the total goodness of God, God's desire to touch every human soul, and the unlimited willingness of God to restore what had been damaged by the forces of evil. At the same time, **Jesus respected the freedom of everyone he met.** And this respect, too, is an essential clue to the nature of God and God's love. Love cannot force itself on anyone, and **God does not force anyone into a relationship no matter how much God longs for it.**

God permits evil, but only so that something greater can come about, specifically a living, intimate relationship with God. But for those who suffer terrible distress or injury or loss, this is difficult or even impossible to believe. So Jesus chose to suffer the greatest possible distress, injury, and loss conceivable in his day, trusting that the Father would bring about a greater good. Jesus was not willing to teach what he was not prepared to practice. **There is no possible hardship that we can endure greater than crucifixion, so there is no evil that we suffer that God cannot redeem. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection is given to us as a pattern.** It's something we can model our lives on. But so often we fear and **our fear causes us to withdraw from God,** or we become stuck in anger and refuse to go to God, or anxiety overwhelms us and we cannot trust and cannot even move.

The remedy Jesus gave us to overcome our fears, bitterness, and anxiety is the Eucharist, the sacrament of his body and blood, given on the night before he died to connect us with his death. **By joining in the body and blood of Christ, we are united to the saving event of the Cross and at the same time meet the risen Lord in the intimacy of our own bodies and souls.** By consciously bringing our suffering to the Father with that of Jesus, **we attain solidarity with him and a renewal of our spirit.** But like physical exercise, the full effects offered by this sacramental remedy **demand regular practice.** No one would expect results from occasional, infrequent visits to a health club. So it is with the sacrament life of Christ. **Help is real, but gradual and progressive. This Easter can be the beginning of a palpable renewal in your lives.** Jesus died and was raised that you might believe the great love and desire God has for you.