

Easter Vigil “The Life Altering Implications of the Resurrection”

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In 1897, a reporter by the name of Frank Marshall White sent a message to Samuel Clemens, also known as Mark Twain, to comment on rumors that he was on his death bed in London. Mark Twain hand wrote a letter back to him which White had the pleasure of publishing in the New York Journal that said, with Twain’s trademark wit, *“I can understand perfectly how the report of my illness got about, I have even heard on good authority that I was dead...The report of my death was an exaggeration.”*

This beautiful quote came to mind this Easter because, although many of us are all still shaken from the horrific fire that brought down Notre Dame Cathedral last Monday, Easter gives us a good reason to be defiantly joyful, even in a time of sorrow. You see, last night we considered that moment when a photographer was finally able to go inside and take a picture of the devastation. And what the world saw was the golden cross of the high altar shining brilliantly and defiantly through all that smoke and rubble. Remember that? It felt like the Cathedral was making an announcement to Parisians and the world, “The report of my demise is greatly exaggerated”. And, after the disheartening and cynical comments floating around during the fire saying that the burning of the Cathedral was a fitting metaphor of a post Christian world, Parisians surprised them by gathering together in the thousands to console one another. Many were holding hands with their neighbors, singing hymns to honor Mary in the streets. There were others who were on their knees together praying the rosary. It felt like, in the face of desolation, the whole city was praying together, and soon after the world joined them. It is truly remarkable when you think about it. And since over a billion Christians throughout the world are celebrating Easter this weekend, it seems that the report of the death of Christianity is greatly exaggerated.

St. Luke proclaims to us, “At daybreak on the first day of the week the women who had come from Galilee with Jesus took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb; but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were puzzling over this, behold, two men in dazzling garments appeared to them. They were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground. They said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised.’”

What is immediately captivating for me is this: Christianity is the only religion that, when judging its veracity, it is dependent on a moment in history, a second in time. For a discerning analytical reader of this text, either Jesus rose from the dead or he didn’t. There are no other option. If he didn’t rise from the dead, Christians are the greatest of fools and building churches like Notre Dame, or Saint Teresa of Calcutta for that matter, make utterly no sense. If Jesus did rise from the dead, however, then Jesus is in fact Lord and God. There is no other option. Either Easter Sunday marks the greatest hoax in the history of the human race or we should be on our knees. Something happened tonight. Something happened that changed the history of the world forever. That something is this: not only did Jesus die for us; Jesus in fact rose from the dead for us and appeared to his followers just like he said he would. It happened. And this means, my friends, Jesus is Lord and God. No exaggeration.

The liturgy these past several days has called us to enter into the story of our salvation, so to rouse us from our weariness so to embrace the Gospel. We recalled that everything that the Chosen People went through from the first Passover of the Exodus thousands of years ago and all the trials, tribulations and tragedies we experienced in the centuries that followed, have led us to this very night. And all of us come tonight with our own histories. All of us come here tonight with our hopes and joys along with our concerns and our sorrows. All of us have a cross that we carry. Sometimes it feels like Easter Sunday comes along in history like a golden cross shining through the smoke and desolation.

My friends, the resurrection of our Lord is life altering and communicates something loud and clear, no matter what you are going through in your life right now, and it is this: God loves you. God will go to hell and back for you. God has invited you to a relationship with him through Jesus Christ to live eternally in the joy of his presence. God expects you to conform your life to Jesus and share his love to the world around you in a spirit of humble service. God has entrusted this message to you. And, you are now called to take this message to the streets and to tell anyone who wants to know that the reports of Christianity's demise is greatly exaggerated. You see, on Easter Sunday, we proclaim joyfully from the alleyways to the rooftops: Jesus Christ is Lord to the Glory of God the Father. Alleluia!