

## Easter Sunday

Text( I Peter 1: 3-9) Subject (**Do You Have A Living Hope?**)

Theme (1. Yes, one of forgiveness. 2. Yes, one of everlasting inheritance. 3. Yes, even under trials.

He is RISEN! He is risen, indeed!! Amen.

This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it! And how can we not join in this marvelous, grand doxology (this hymn of praise) with Peter who, on the first Easter Sunday, breathlessly caught up to young John at the entrance of the empty tomb and without hesitation, bolted past his young friend to examine the empty tomb; the *certainty* of our eternal salvation!

This letter was written by the elder disciple, Peter, more than 30 years after that first Easter morning. Yet the freshness of the resurrection message transports the old preacher with all the vigor and optimism of a youth.

To whom does St. Peter address this epistle? He says in the first two verses of this chapter, “**To God’s elect** (His chosen children) **the pilgrims** (travelers, temporary residents) **throughout**” the world. They were Christians, most of whom were probably of Jewish ancestry. Many had moved from the persecutions of Jerusalem to various parts of the world. So they were twice displaced. They were Jews living in a foreign country, and they were Christians living as pilgrims in a *hostile* society. As such, Peter had many pressing concerns with which to begin this letter. He *could* begin by addressing their persecution at the hands of their new neighbors. He *could* comfort them since they were suspect of being disloyal to the government under which they lived. Peter could begin with a caution not to be like seed sown on rock ground; they should not succumb to their trials and give up their faith in Jesus. Peter *could* have launched into any number of these relevant issues from the outset. Eventually, he touched on them all. But where does he actually begin? With the teaching which is the keystone of the Christian faith: the historical account

of *Jesus' resurrection*. He begins with that happy event on which the church stands or falls: that "He was delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life because of our justification." (as it says in Romans 4). He does this to raise their sights from earth to Heaven. He first spreads before them the future picture that Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee that all who have faith in Him will rise to everlasting life on the Last Day.

He starts by saying "**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!**" (Peter writes) To be "blessed", of course, is to know comfort and joy. And such is our God! For He has completed His plan to send His Son to suffer, die and rise again for us! All true, divine "comfort and joy" come only from *Him*.

Peter continues, ... "**Who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope...**" Who better to praise the Lord than Peter; the apostle who was forgiven *much*? He who, in the courtyard of Caiaphas, brought down terrible oaths on himself, *denying* that he knew Jesus and later, weeping bitterly, spending three days in the soul's black night of despair. During what must have been the longest weekend of his life, Peter had time to ponder the words of the One in which he had placed his confidence. Finally, when Jesus walked into the locked room and proved that he had broken death's iron shackles, all that Peter was pondering came into focus. The Lord had risen, just as he had told them!

What great comfort and joy, then, for us who (like Peter) have twisted, broken and "blown apart" our baptismal and confirmation vows! With sin-darkened hearts we have bad-mouthed each other, had evil thoughts and transgressed when we thought no one was looking! We did not deserve "mercy"...but the tears of repentance did not go unnoticed, thanks be to God. His "abundant mercy" and grace in the crucified and risen Savior brought us to faith. From the time we were baptized and "born again" through the message of salvation we possessed something that *very few* on earth have: a LIVING hope, as Peter says, "**through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**" Of all the religions in the world,

only ONE has a leader Who lived, suffered, died....and ROSE again! He Who once was born, lived in Galilee, traveled throughout the land of Israel, was eventually beaten and murdered in Jerusalem. Why? To forgive us. Death could not hold the Son of God. Remember: “He was raised again ***because*** of our justification”! We have been forgiven and “buried with Christ through baptism into death” (as Paul says in Romans). We now have a “new life”....a LIVING hope in the risen Christ.

To what end? “**To an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled**” (something *given* to us by God that is eternal; given only to His “sons”; that is, His children in the faith). People outside the family, in Jesus’ day, could not “inherit” anything. In the same way, souls *outside* of Christianity cannot “inherit” the kingdom of God. It is ours alone, by God’s grace alone, through faith in Christ alone. And that “treasure” of Heaven (unlike precious metals, jewels and castles) can never rot, corrode or be given to someone else. It is ours *forever*! Thieves can never take what Jesus has given us. Peter says, “**And that does *not* fade away**” (it is) **reserved in Heaven for you**. Jesus promised to go “prepare a place for you”. Like a bank account, your “place” in Heaven is “reserved” for you. Your “reservation” has been written in divine blood. It is being “held” for you by the holy “credit card” of Christ’s resurrection! *No one* can take it from you. NO ONE!

Let us never forget that we, God’s children by faith, (as Peter says) “**are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation**”. Heaven is ours and we are being “protected and guarded” until we are ready to enter the gates of Paradise. But how are we “kept, protected and guarded”? By angels? For sure. But even *better*, the “armor” of God’s grace in Christ, His love, mercy, grace and forgiveness “watch over us”; repelling the Devil’s lies and strengthening our hearts through that Gospel message..... It is ours “through faith” (as the apostle says). “Salvation” is ours and the journey ends in Heaven! We have been freed from the guilt of our sin, death has no valid hold on us and the threat of Hell is

gone.....because of Jesus' death and resurrection. Let the future come. We are ready. ☺

The very last “step” of our “salvation” (Peter says) will “**be revealed in the last time.**” The signs of the Second Coming of Christ will, One Day, become more, and more obvious. And even though they crescendo with persecution, pain and separation from family.....(Peter says) “**in this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,** (God will determine if you or I need further trials or tribulations to prove our faith or to give us more perseverance but through it all .....we have Jesus, we have forgiveness and eternal life because He lives.) Peter reminds us that the trials come so “**that the genuineness (the true trust of a believer) of your faith,** (itself a gift from God through our baptism and the Gospel) **being much more precious than gold that perishes**”. Besides, a divine gift is *always* more valuable than *anything* we could name on earth. Money, gold, diamonds, even family will slip through our fingers one Day.) And “**though (your faith) is tested by fire,** (through unbelieving “friends”, pagan media, our sinful flesh, and the Devil himself) **may (it) be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,** (for that is the true nature of faith. It desires to glorify its Giver, its Creator, its Savior, and others need to see your trust in Him!).

Peter says, “**Whom having not seen you love.**” Saint John says we love God because “He first loved US!” How strange it must seem to the unbelieving world that we profess to have trust in a Being we *cannot* see, that we confess undying gratitude to One Whom we have never observed. “Faith”, *indeed*, “is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen.” “**Though now you do not see Him, yet believing,** (Yes, in spite of all our “friends” taunts, the T.V.s snide remarks, and our sinful flesh’s constant fighting....we “believe in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit). As a result “**you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.**” Why? Because through all the trials

of our lives, the struggles with unbelievers and the threats of our sinful flesh we know, by God's grace, that we have inherited Heaven through Jesus Christ the risen Savior. Because He suffered, died and rose again for us, forgiveness and everlasting Paradise is ours..... "I know that my Redeemer lives!" We, most *certainly*, have a living hope!

In Jesus' Name,  
Amen.

