



## Opening Question:

*Do you sometimes think about the end of your life? What emotions do you feel at the thought of death?*

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.*

*Nicene Creed*

*God's Kingdom will soon be here! Repent and believe the Good News!*

*Mark 1:14*

In this simple phrase, Jesus proclaimed his ministry in word and deed. He taught God would soon be present. And he acted as if that were already the case. He made people whole spiritually and physically. But his ministry implied more. It foreshadowed what the presence of God meant: self-giving. The Father gave to humanity far, far more than what he asked of it. He gave the life of his Son as a gift that would reconcile people to their maker. While the journey to God's gift began in Galilee, it gained speed when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem and taught in the Temple.

## Place of Jesus in Judaism

The presence, the message and the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem raised the eyebrows of the local elite. The religious authorities and Jesus answered the same question: how can we please God? Both found the key in the Jewish Law but they had radically different perspectives. The Pharisees taught a Jew could please God by focusing on strict observance of the Law. For the leaders, what Jews did was more important than why they did it. They pointed to the letter of the Law. Jesus, however, spoke to the spirit of the Law. Why people did what



they did was more important than just what they did. Intent trumped behavior.

Jesus taught this message in the holiest place for Jews: the Temple. As a son of Abraham, he honored the place where Jews believed God definitely dwelt. But, he could foresee the Temple as a fragile institution that would soon be destroyed. The message and mission of Jesus in the holy place stood in stark contrast to that of the religious elite. His presence was an affront to the leaders and upset the social order. They determined he had to go.

## Death of Christ

*For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried...*

*Nicene Creed*

At an opportune time, the leaders moved against Jesus. They arrested him quietly at night. They put him on trial, first before the religious council, then before the civic authority. Both the elites and the Roman governor Pilate condemned him to death and had him crucified as a common criminal. Yet, this was God's plan all along.

In one violent act, God revealed our guilt as sinners and his self-giving love for us. When we sin, we reject God's gift of his very Son and the reconciliation he offered. We, like the leaders at

the time, bear the guilt of rejecting Christ. We cannot shift the blame for his death to anyone else. It's nobody's fault but ours.

But, Christ was not just a passive player in this event. He even predicted his destiny:

*To serve God's will, the Son of Man must suffer many things. He will be judged by the leaders in Jerusalem and will be killed there. But, then, he will rise again from the dead.*

Mark 8:31

In this way, he fulfilled God's plan as set out in the Scriptures. The prophet Isaiah wrote:

*My servant suffered and endured*

*great pain for us,*

*but we thought his suffering*

*was punishment from God.*

*He was wounded and crushed*

*because of our sins;*

*by taking our punishment,*

*he made us completely well.*

*The Lord decided his servant*

*would suffer as a sacrifice*

*to take away the sin*

*and guilt of others.*

Isaiah 53:4-5, 10

So, to fulfill the divine will, Jesus gave himself up to the Father as an offering. It was the definitive act of worship greater than any other. He invites us to join him in his worship, in our prayer, our worship, and even in our daily lives. As Jesus told his followers:

*If anyone wants to join me, he must stop being selfish. He must pick up his cross, carry it, and follow me.*

Matthew 16:24

After Jesus underwent death, his body remained in the tomb for three days. However, he went to Hades in Greek, called hell in the Apostles' Creed. This was simply the place of the dead, not a realm of punishment and torment. There he revealed the

Good News to the deceased and granted salvation to the faithful souls who awaited the arrival of the Lord. As first Peter stated:

*Christ died once for our sins...his body was put to death and his spirit was alive. Christ then preached to the spirits that were being kept in prison.*

1 Peter 3:18ac, 19

## **The Resurrection of Christ**

*(He) rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.*

Nicene Creed

There are two signs that act as proof for the Resurrection of Christ: the empty tomb and the various appearances of the Risen Jesus. All four of the Gospels point to the empty tomb as the first sign. Mary Magdalene and her companions encountered. Then, the gospels present different scenes where Christ appeared to his disciples and gave them the mission to continue his ministry. As he told his followers in Luke:

*Scripture says the Messiah would suffer and die but would rise three days later. It also says his followers would go to people from every nation with a message: 'Turn back to God and he will forgive you!'*

Luke 24:46-47

What does the Resurrection do for us? It changed everything. The Risen Christ revealed work of the Trinity, He showed the will of the Father and his own divinity when he raised himself from death by the power of the Spirit. He showed us death is not the end but a promising beginning. He has a physical existence that transcends space and time. In doing so, he revealed our destiny as believers. But, in a very real sense, his death and resurrection empowers us right now. As St. Paul wrote to the community in Rome:

*Don't you realize that when we were baptized into Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death? But, the glory of the Father raised Christ from the dead, just so we could live a new life.*

Romans 6:3, 4b

## The Ascension of Christ

*He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father.*

*Nicene Creed*

*Just before Jesus left, he instructed his chosen Apostles with the power of God's Spirit. They saw him for forty days after he rose from the dead. And he taught them about God's Kingdom. Afterwards, they saw Jesus ascend into heaven. Soon, a cloud blocked their view.*

*As they stared at the sky, two men stood before them in shining clothes. "Hey! Men from Galilee!" they said. "Why do you stand here looking up? You saw Jesus ascend into heaven. You will see him return the same way."*

*Acts 1:2b, 3b, 9-10*

## The Return of Christ in Glory

*He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.*

*Nicene Creed*

*Christ freely gave us his gifts. The Bible says: "After he went up to the mountain top, he led prisoners to freedom and he gave gifts to everyone." Do the words "he went up" really have any meaning, unless he came down to depths of the earth? One who descends also ascends beyond heaven so he can fill all things!*

*Ephesians 4:7-9 (Psalm 68:18)*

Even in his risen body, Christ transcends all things yet he is present in all things. In this way, he is the head not only of the Church but of all creation. If we just look, we can see Christ in ourselves, in others, and even in creation itself. St. Patrick saw this in his famous prayer:

*Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit,  
Christ where I arise...*

Even though Christ is in glory, the job isn't finished. We wait for his return. But, while we wait, we pray for and work with others in the hope that they will come to faith. This may not be easy for we will

struggle with evil leaders and cultural movements that will lead people astray. Regardless of any dark times ahead, we have hope that Christ will return, God's justice will prevail, and he will reward the faithful with eternal life.

## Closing Question:

*How does faith in the Risen Christ comfort you?*

*Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs 571-682.*

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