

The Resurrection of Our Lord
St. Mark 16:1-8

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Media vita in morte sumus, the 14th century hymn begins. "In the midst of life we are in death." It is often recited at committal services. It confesses the frailty of these bodies, the weakness of this flesh, and the brevity of this fallen life.

"In the midst of earthly life, snares of death surround us," a more modern translation puts it. No matter the effort you put into it, you are surrounded by death, laying for you like a trap. School shootings, terrorist bombings, stillborn children, and many other things come upon you unexpectedly. But, there are also the expected endings of life, such as for a terminal disease and old age. All around you see constant reminders that you are mortal; even the very earth that you tread upon reminds you, for you are dust and to dust you shall return.

This is the curse that you bear, pronounced on you in the Garden of Eden before Adam and the woman were expelled. And though the woman would be given the name Eve—Mother of the Living—still the snares of death surrounded them. They were sinners, and the wages of sin is death. Centuries later, the earth received that which it had once given for the man to be created. Graciously, you might say, you don't have to wait centuries for the same to happen to you, but because you are sinners like your father Adam before you, the earth will one day receive you, too. You are dust and to dust you shall return.

No, there's no way out by your own works or merit. You are met with the snares of death at every turn. This is your lot in this fallen life because the wages of sin is death, and they are always payable upon demand!

"From whom can we seek help?" "Who shall help us in the strife lest the foe confound us?" "From You alone, O Lord, who by our sins are justly angered." "Thou only, Lord, Thou only! We mourn that we have greatly erred, that our sin Thy wrath have stirred." Jesus is your only Help in this strife against sin. How?

In order to be your Help, He became your Substitute, and in order to become your Substitute, He first became one with you. He was conceived of the Virgin Mary by the Holy Ghost. He was formed in a womb like you were! He was born, grew in stature and wisdom, and even acquired a trade. All the while, He remained who He always has been, the omnipotent, omnipresent, eternal God and Creator of the universe. Jesus, being in very nature God, was a man in every respect as you were. He had flesh and bones, ate, drank, learned and grew, and worked just like you do! However, though He was man after the substance of His father Adam—your father Adam—He was sinless, as is the very nature of His Father in heaven.

Now, come as man, Jesus becomes your Substitute. He was baptized, sanctifying water as a washing of regeneration. He ministered to people of all sorts and conditions, healing them, raising them from the dead, giving them the wisdom of the ages if they had the ears to hear. He made His way to Jerusalem where He would stand before the Sanhedrin and Pilate, silently and innocently receiving the accusations of sinfulness, and the guilt that goes along with it. Then, dripping with the guilt and shame of your sins and sinfulness, He was led to a hill outside the city, where He was nailed to a cross like a common Roman criminal. *Ecce homo!* Behold the man! See the Victim. And He died.

In the midst of earthly life, you are in death. It is there, hanging from the cross, that you see the condemnation for your sins. Look closely, dear hearers, for it is only found there. That means, Jesus being your substitute, that the condemnation for your sins lies not with you!

Joseph and Nicodemus bury the body of Jesus. He rested in the tomb and so sanctified the graves of all believers as sepulchers which will keep these mortal remains until the days of immortality.

Because, here's where your help comes from, dear hearers: the grave did not hold the Son of God. It could not. He burst forth from those bindings, leaving death and sin and destruction behind. He rose—the Victim is the Victor.

I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. (John 11:25-26)

Never die? But, "In the midst of life we are in death." Yes, death surrounds you on all side, reminding you of your mortality. Though sanctified and washed in the waters of Holy Baptism, confessing faith in Jesus Christ as your only Savior, your bodies will see death. However, for the sake of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, your Savior, death is a conquered enemy, no longer to be feared, but to be met as the portal to life immortal. (cf. Philippians 1:21)

The death of Jesus Christ your Lord is the shedding of His blood as your atonement. The resurrection of Jesus Christ your Lord is your victory over death and the grave. For the sake of Christ, you are forgiven. For the sake of Christ, you will live forever, even though you may die.

Therefore, hallelujah, Christ is risen! [Let the congregation respond.] Shouts of Christ is risen have been ringing out the world over. It started centuries ago at the grave of Jesus, as the angels said to the woman, and it has been continuing for those centuries since, Sunday after Sunday, as Jesus Christ and Him crucified and risen is proclaimed. Even among families who have lost love ones—whether an elderly parent, a stillborn child, or anything in between—the greeting is made, "Christ is risen!" In those places that have suffered terrorist bombings, such as in Tanta and Alexandria, Egypt, where the blood of martyrs stained the face of Christ just one week ago, the greeting is made, "Christ is risen!"

The death of loved ones and the loss of the martyrs is mourned, but you rejoice in the life that they have been given in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You will be mourned, too, on the day that God deems to call you from this earthly life, but there will also be much rejoicing that day, bittersweet that it may be, because of the eternal life that you have been given for the sake of Jesus Christ.

A man who was at one of the Coptic churches bombed on Palm Sunday was interviewed. This man lost his wife and daughter to the heinous act. When asked how he felt, he responded,

I am not sad, but happy that they have received the crown of glory the Lord has promised them. They are safer now than if they were with me. I have my limits but Christ has no limitations. I rejoice that the Lord has made this possible for them to spend it with Him ALWAYS. Is there anything sweeter or better than being with Your Lord and God? The prophet David said, "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness."

Praise God for the death of His saints—rejoice at the death of the martyrs. They have that for which you still endeavor. "By them are chanted songs that ne'er to mortal ears were granted." They have received the crown of life which Jesus Himself promised: "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." (Revelation 2:10b) This you look forward to, especially as you cry out, "Hallelujah, Christ is risen!" [Let the congregation respond.]

Christ has no limits, as the father confessed on Egyptian TV! He is the author of Life, and death is no limit for it—not for Doris Bissitt, not for Sebastian, not for the Egyptian martyrs, and not for any of His saints who have gone before you with the sign of faith and now rest in their hallowed chambers. And His grace and life are limitless for you, He has promised to you the same crown of life which they now wear. It's a reversal of that 14th century hymn: in the midst of death, you are in life, the life given you for the sake of Jesus Christ, for whose sake also, you are forgiven for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.