

Christ is risen! Alleluia!

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

Easter is more than a day; it's a season. It's more than a season; it's the every Sunday celebration of the Church. It's more than just a Sunday thing; it's the everyday reality of our lives in Christ. We are Easter people, who rejoice in singing the new song to the Lamb who was slain, to the Lamb whose blood ransomed us from captivity to sin and death and Satan, to the Lamb who made us royal priests, called out of darkness, to reign with Him in His light forever. We rejoice with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven. And we even rejoice with the lowly creatures on earth and under the earth and in the sea, singing "*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!*"

But for us to live in this Easter reality, it's important for us to be certain that it's really so. You remember what St. Paul told us on Easter: "*If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. ... For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins ... If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied*" (1 Cor. 15:12-14, 16-17, 19).

"*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead*" (1 Cor. 15:20), Paul goes on to assert with certainty — in fact with the confidence of one who has seen the risen Christ, as Paul had on the road to Damascus. Paul's encounter was not a vision like that of Ananias, but a physical encounter with the Lord Jesus, as Paul would later say: "*Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me*" (1 Cor. 15:8). Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Also in the Gospel, the disciples responded with certainty at another resurrection appearance of Jesus. It was the third time that Jesus revealed Himself to the disciples (this time, too, including Thomas), and after the Thomas incident, none of the disciples dared ask who He was. "*They knew it was the Lord.*"

How could they be so sure? After all, Jesus didn't called them by name, as He did with Mary Magdalene outside the tomb. Jesus didn't made their "*hearts burn within [them] while he talked to [them] [as He did] on the road [to Emmaus], while he opened to [them] the Scriptures*" (Luke 24:32). He didn't show the disciples His wounds or invite the disciples to touch them in the locked room. This time He revealed Himself through a miracle very much like the time He called Peter and the sons of Zebedee into His service (Luke 5:1-11). Both this time and the previous one, the disciples had been fishing without success. Both this time and the previous one, Jesus had told them to let down their nets. Both this time and the previous one, they did as Jesus commanded and were rewarded with a large catch of fish.

That was enough for John to recognize Jesus and exclaim: *“It is the Lord!”* ... and for Peter to jump into the sea to meet the Lord. Gone were doubts; gone were fears; what remained was Easter joy. Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Dear Christian saints, cast off your doubts and fears; revel in the Easter joy of Christ’s resurrection. “With high delight Let us unite In songs of great jubilation,” our sermon hymn exhorted us! It proclaims: Christ has set us free “from misery and death.” “His death has been death’s undoing,” giving “His life for us,” renewing ours. Yes, “to set us free forever, He is ris’n,” it proclaims, giving us “All joy and full consolation” (LSB483), giving us certainty in our own resurrection.

The writer to the Hebrews speaks of this certainty in Christ Jesus. He writes: *“we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh”* (Heb. 10:19-20). We have confidence because *“Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed”* (1 Cor. 5:7), *“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29), Christ, the Lamb slain but living.

The writer to the Hebrews writes: *“let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water”* (Heb. 10:22). We are assured, not because of what we have done but because of what Christ has done for us, giving *“himself up for”* His church (Eph. 5:25), and because by His mercy He gave us Holy Baptism whereby we are grafted into Christ, into His death and resurrection (which you heard if you were able to be at the funeral on Friday), because by this *“washing of water and the word”* Christ Himself sanctifies and cleanses us and presents us *“to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that [we] might be holy and without blemish”* (Eph. 5:26-27).

The writer to the Hebrews writes: *“hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”* Again, we were reminded on Friday, *“The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; ... if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself”* (2 Tim. 2:11-13). Though we are saved through faith, our unwavering hope is not in our faith, but in God’s faithfulness and in His promises.

Therefore, be confident in Christ and His atoning work! Be assured because of Christ and the gifts He gives to us. Hold fast to your hope because of the promises of Him who is faithful even when we are not.

This certainty is surely Biblical as we heard; it is also characteristic of Lutheran theology. Philip Melancthon writes in the Apology: “We teach that the Gospel requires this certainty of faith.” He says again, this “Gospel [is] that [we] should be firmly confident that sins are forgiven freely for Christ’s sake, and that [we] should not doubt this” (Apology, Article XI Confession, 88). On the other hand, the

“adversaries [namely, the Roman Catholics] leave consciences uncertain and wavering” (Apology XI:88).

These adversaries rail against what they call our “vain confidence,” saying “it must not be said that sins are forgiven or have been forgiven to anyone who boasts of his confidence and certainty of the remission of his sins, resting on that alone ...” (Council of Trent Sixth Session, Decree concerning Justification, Chapter IX: Against the Vain Confidence of Heretics). Yet, that’s precisely what Peter relied on, because of His heart-rending denial of Jesus three times. He relied on the absolution spoken three times by Christ. So shall we rely solely “in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake” (Trent, Session VI, Canon XII).

And again, the adversaries condemned us for our certainty, saying “no one can know with the certainty of faith ... that he has obtained the grace of God” (Trent, Session VI, Chapter IX). And the Canons concerning Justification in the Council of Trent have plenty more to say against the confidence and certainty Lutherans preach regarding our salvation.

Therefore, how striking was the homily delivered at the funeral of Pope Francis that spoke of this very thing — “the certainty of faith”! If you listened to it, you would have heard the preacher say: “we are sustained by the certainty of faith, which assures us that human existence does not end in the tomb, but in the Father’s house, in a life of happiness that will know no end” (“Pope Francis’ Funeral: Full Text of Homily by Cardinal Re,” [NCRegister.com](http://NCRegister.com)). Surely, we Lutherans could say “Amen” to that statement. Not “*faith working through love*” (Gal. 5:6), but the “certainty of faith.” It seems that even Roman Catholic popes become Lutheran in the face of death — saved by grace through faith and not by works (Eph. 2:8-9).

For not even Peter was saved by his works, not by his mundane fishing or by his high office of tending and feeding the lambs and sheep of Christ’s flock. He was not saved by the sacrifice of his own life. Rather, Peter was saved by his faith in Christ, a faith that would “suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it” (*Lutheran Service Book*, Confirmation rite), a faith that would by his own “*stretch[ing] out [of his] hands*” in death confess with his fellow apostle, “*I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Rom. 8:38-39).

God grant us, His Easter people, this same certainty. God grant it to us daily, but, especially when we come face to face with death. O God, “[c]omfort us with the certain hope of the resurrection to everlasting life and a joyful reunion with those we love who have died in the faith; through Jesus Christ, ... our Lord” (*Lutheran Service Book*, Funeral rite, Concluding Collect).

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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