

CHAPTER FORTY - JESUS CHRIST, YESTERDAY, TODAY AND THE SAME FOREVER

The darkness of that Sabbath night was just giving place today. It was beginning to dawn towards the first day of the week. Within the sealed sepulchre all was stillness and gloom, The mangled Body in its wrappings lay motionless, stiff and cold. Suddenly a blaze of glory filled the rocky chamber, and in the midst was Jesus, Jesus risen from the dead to die no more! The Soul had returned from Limbo and re-entered the Body, and He rose, Body and Soul reunited for ever, in a majesty and beauty befitting the Son of God.

He was the very same, but oh! how changed; all the marks of His suffering and humiliation gone, only in hands and feet and side five Wounds, not disfiguring, but glorifying Him by their dazzling beauty. As He rose by His own power, so by His own power He left the tomb; no angel rolled back the stone to let Him pass, but, with the subtlety that belongs to a glorified body, He passed through, leaving the guards still sleeping and the seal untouched. But the next instant Jerusalem was shaken to its foundations by a great earthquake, for an Angel of the Lord descended from Heaven, and, coming, rolled back the stone and sat upon it. And his countenance was as lightning, and his raiment as snow. And for fear of him the guards were struck with terror and became as dead men. One, one only of those who believed in Him was preparing to welcome Him back from the grave. She who kept all His words, pondering them in her heart, held fast the promise: "and the third day He shall rise again." She knew He would return to her. She was counting the hours all that sad Saturday, and, when night fell, she was keeping watch and turning continually to the East for the first streaks of the coming day. We wonder, perhaps, that with hope such as hers sorrow could have been so crushing. But, whilst her Son was absent and the memory of His sufferings was allowed to overwhelm her, there could be no consolation for that stricken Mother. She could only make her acts of faith and hope, and wait patiently till He should come. And He came! More swiftly than the lightning flashing from East to West, He passed from His rocky tomb to her chamber on Mount Sion, and as swiftly came the change in that desolate heart from midnight darkness to midday brightness and joy. The dawn was only breaking, the third day scarcely come, when He returned from the grave, eager to comfort those who mourned for Him, and His Mother first of all. The Scripture, indeed, does not mention His visit to her, but can we think that the best of sons would refuse this honour and consolation to His Mother? St. Ignatius of Loyola says that anyone who could doubt that Christ's first visit was to her, would deserve to hear His own word of reproach: "Are you also without understanding?"

The meeting between the Mother and the Son was for themselves alone. It will be one of the joys of Heaven to know what passed between them in those first moments of His Risen Life. All we know now is that Mary could say with greater truth than David: "According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, thy comforts have given joy to my soul." Both were eager for the glad surprises of this blessed day to begin soon. He must hasten to comfort those who on His account were in such bitter trouble. And so He left her to go on His errands of love, to do that work of comforting which is always the delight of His Sacred

Heart.

Who could come next but Magdalen? After His Blessed Mother's, no heart was so desolate as hers. She had stayed by Him to the end, had helped to lay Him in His grave, had sat at the door weeping when all had gone away. As long as there was anything she could do for Him, even after death, her love was restless, and so she set out very early on the first day of the week, with the holy women her companions, to finish the embalming of the sacred Body. On the way to the Sepulchre they remembered the huge stone at the entrance and wondered how they would get in. But the difficulty did not stop them, and on their arrival they found the stone rolled away and the entrance to the tomb wide open. Without waiting to see anything further, Magdalen in dismay ran off to Peter and John and said to them:

"They have taken away the Lord out of the Sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid Him." In the meantime the other women went into the Sepulchre and saw a young man sitting at the right side clothed with a white robe, and they were astonished. And he said to them:

"Fear not you, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for He is risen as He said. Come and see the place where the Lord was laid. And going quickly tell His disciples and Peter that He is risen, and, behold, He will go before you into Galilee, there you shall see Him as He told you." And they going out fled from the Sepulchre, for a trembling and fear had seized them. And they went quickly with fear and great joy, running to tell His disciples.

What running there was that morning! for Peter and John, on hearing Magdalen's tale, both ran together to the Sepulchre. They saw the stone rolled back, and the linen cloths in which our Lord had been swathed folded together, but there was no angel there now to explain what it all meant. Full of wonder and perplexity they had gone home again, when Magdalen, who had followed them, arrived and went in. There she stood before the empty tomb weeping. Now, as she was weeping, she stooped down and looked into the Sepulchre: and she saw two Angels in white, sitting one at the head and one at the feet where the Body of Jesus had been laid. They said to her:

"Woman, why weepest thou ?" She said to them:

"Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him." When she had said this she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing ; and she knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her:

"Woman, why weepest thou ? whom seekest thou?" She, thinking that it was the gardener, said to Him:

"Sir, if thou hast taken Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her:

"Mary." She, turning, said to Him: "Rabboni," which is to say: Master. Jesus said to her:

"Do not touch Me, for I am not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them: I ascend to My Father and to your Father, to My God and to your God." Mary Magdalen went and told the disciples, who were mourning and weeping:

"I have seen the Lord and these things He said to me." And they, hearing that He was alive and had been seen by her, did not believe. Her two companions were on their way to Jerusalem to deliver the Angel's message, when Jesus met them, saying:

"All hail!" And they came up and took hold of His feet and adored Him. And Jesus said to them:

"Fear not, go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, there they shall see Me." But Magdalen's radiant face and joyful words:

"I have seen the Lord," and the assurances of her companions that they had kissed His feet, failed to cheer the disciples. Only the women had seen Him, they said, and who could believe such idle tales as theirs!

Two of them were so weighed down with sorrow that they left Jerusalem in the afternoon to go to a little village called Emmaus. As they went they talked over all that had happened since Friday, but stopped short on finding that a stranger had suddenly joined them. He saw they were in trouble and said kindly:

"What are these discourses that you hold one with another as you walk, and are sad?" One of them, whose name was Cleophas, answered:

"Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things that have been done there in these days?" To whom He said:

"What things?" And they said:

"Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in work and word before God and all the people; and how our chief priests and princes delivered Him to be condemned to death and crucified Him. But we hoped that it was He that should have redeemed Israel; and now, besides all this, today is the third day since these things were done. Yea, and certain women also of our company affrighted us, who before it was light were at the Sepulchre, and, not finding His Body, came saying that they had also seen a vision of Angels who say that He is alive. And some of our people went to the Sepulchre and found it so as the women had said, but Him they found not." The Stranger listened quietly to the end of their story. Then He said:

"O foolish and slow of heart to believe in all things which the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and so to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses He showed them from all the prophets that He who was to come was to be a suffering Messiah, not the founder of an earthly kingdom as the Jews expected. So far, then, from being cast down by what had befallen their Master, they ought to take comfort from it, seeing how exactly all the prophecies had been fulfilled in Him. Moreover, if suffering was the way by which the Messiah was to redeem the world, it was not to last forever. For Him and for all His followers the cross was to lead to the crown.

The disciples listened with rapt attention. Here was a new light thrown upon that shameful death of their dear Master which had seemed to be the end of all their hopes. The cloud upon their hearts began to lift. A strange peace and joy seemed to flow to them, not from the words alone, but from the very Presence of the Stranger. They could not bear to part from Him; He had made all the difference in their lives. They drew nigh to the town whither they were going, and He made as though He would have gone farther, but they constrained Him, saying:

"Stay with us, because it is towards evening and the day is now far spent." And He went in with them. And while He was at table with them, He took bread, and blessed, and broke and gave to them. And their eyes were opened and they knew Him, and He vanished out of their sight. Here, then, was the explanation of that happy afternoon. And they said one to the other:

"Was not our heart burning within us whilst He spoke in the way and opened to us the Scriptures?" And rising up the same hour, they went back to Jerusalem, and they found the Eleven gathered together, and those that were with them. Before they could speak they were welcomed with the glad cry:

"The Lord is risen, indeed, and hath appeared to Simon!" They looked around. How different the state of things in the Upper Chamber from what they had left a few hours ago! Joy on every face. Peter's a sight never to be forgotten; such peace there, such deep content. No word of what had passed between him and his Master escaping him, as if his secret were too sweet to be broken by a word, but the certainty of the Resurrection so strong within him that on his simple assurance the rest believed: "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon." He is confirming his brethren according to our Lord's words at the Supper.

At last Cleophas and his companion get a hearing and tell their story of the wondrous walk that afternoon, and Who went with them, and how they did not know Him till the breaking of bread. Those who had not yet seen our Lord listened with beating hearts; they believed, but oh, that they too might see Him! A stir; a startled cry! For there He stood in their midst—Himself, the very same; the face, the look, the smile they knew so well.

"Peace be to you ; it is I, fear not," He said. But they being troubled and affrighted supposed

that they saw a spirit. And He said to them:

"Why are you troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? See My hands and feet, that it is I Myself; handle and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones as you see Me to have." And, when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet. The disciples, therefore, were glad when they saw the Lord. But while they yet believed not and wondered for joy, He said:

"Have you here anything to eat I" And they offered Him a piece of broiled fish and a honeycomb. And when He had eaten before them, taking the remains, He gave to them. Then He said to them again:

"Peace be to you. As the Father hath sent Me, I also send you." When He had said this He breathed on them, and He said to them: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained."

The third Sacrament instituted in the Upper Chamber. The Thursday before, the Blessed Sacrament had been instituted there; the Apostles had been made priests, and received the awful power to consecrate. And now, reserved for the evening of this glad Easter Day, when His word again and again is "Peace," He institutes and leaves in His Church for ever the blessed Sacrament of forgiveness, the Sacrament of Peace.

How grand is our Lord's generosity in this first meeting with His poor disciples ! How completely He sweeps away all fear that their desertion of Him is to make any difference in His feeling towards them! Even if the women's tale were true and the Lord was risen indeed, He would look out now for followers more worthy of Him. So they must have thought. He knew this and set Himself to reassure and comfort them in every way that loving Heart of His could devise. Before His Passion it was their suffering, rather than His own, that troubled Him. In His Risen Life, what is due to Himself seems forgotten in His concern for them. One would think He had to make amends to them for what they had borne for His sake. And so He hastens here and there, from one group to another, bringing brightness and happiness to all. Before His Passion they were "friends," now they are "brethren." His one thought this Easter Day is to bring joy to all who love Him. Not so much as a hint at any need of forgiveness. Oh, what a beautiful character is our dearest Lord's!

At the Last Supper it seemed as if self-forgetting love could go no further. But when He comes back from the grave, and the weight that all His life long had pressed upon His Sacred Heart is gone, there is a gladness, almost playfulness, about Him as He appears and disappears and hides, that takes us by surprise, and discloses depths of tenderness we had not known before. One alone of the Eleven, Thomas, was still in trouble because in unbelief. He was not with them when Jesus came. On his return the rest exclaimed joyfully:

"We have seen the Lord !" But he said to them:

"Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Poor St. Thomas! few among the Apostles loved the Master better than he. It was the very depth of his affection that made him hesitate to believe what seemed too good to be true. Perhaps, too, he was a little jealous of the others. Why had he missed what had made them so joyful! His mind worked slowly. He did not jump at conclusions. The impulsiveness of Peter, James, and John was something of a trial to him. He rather prided himself on the prudence of his resolve not to believe like them till he had seen like them. And so he remained aloof, wretched and miserable, a trial to them all. But they saw how he was suffering, and they were patient with him and kind. And their charity was rewarded. He had no right, it is true, to lay down the conditions on which he would believe, and to get himself into such a state that nothing but a miracle could bring him round. But if faith and hope had gone, love remained, and our Lord had pity on him and humoured him and gave him the proofs he required. After eight days again the disciples were within, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst and said:

"Peace be to you." Then He said to Thomas: "Put in thy finger hither, and see My hands, and bring hither thy hand and put it into My side, and be not faithless, but believing." Thomas answered and said to Him:

"My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him:

"Because thou hast seen Me, Thomas, thou hast believed; blessed are they that have not seen and have believed."

Our Lord's Appearances after His Resurrection were for His friends alone. His enemies had abundant proof that He was risen, but they did not see Him again. They had had their day of grace, and His visible presence on earth was no longer for them. He had told them shortly before His Passion that if they believed not Moses and the Prophets, neither would they believe if one should rise from the dead. These words were fulfilled now, for the awful "signs" of Friday afternoon and Sunday morning left them hardened as before.

When the guards at the Sepulchre, who, at the presence of the Angel, were struck with terror and became as dead men, had come to themselves, they went into the City and told the chief priests all things that had been done. And they being assembled together, taking counsel, gave a great sum of money to the soldiers, saying.

"Say you: His disciples came by night and stole Him away when we were asleep. And if the Governor shall hear of this, we will persuade him and secure you." So they, taking the money, did as they were taught. "And this word was spread abroad among the Jews even unto this day," says St. Matthew.

"Spread abroad" it might be, but not believed. That the disciples of Jesus, simple, timid men, who had all taken flight when He was seized in the Garden, and had not dared to

show themselves since, could have attempted such a thing, or that Roman soldiers, trained up under strict military discipline, and placed there only the evening before, should be all asleep at the same time, and should sleep so soundly and so long as not to be awakened either by the rolling away of the stone or the carrying off of the body—this was a story too ridiculous to deceive any. But the soldiers, who had nothing to lose and much to gain by spreading it abroad, did as they were told. It was no concern of theirs that people asked: if they were asleep how could they see the theft of the body? If they did not see it how were they witnesses?

"He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh at them," says Holy Scripture, speaking of the plots of the wicked. These words come to mind as we see the priests carefully sealing the stone and setting their guards on that Sabbath afternoon. These guards were the first witnesses to the Resurrection, and that seal was its surest sign. God allowed it so to be for the confirmation of our faith. He knew that everything about our Divine Lord would be attacked by unbelievers, that the day would come when the Mystery which is the very foundation of our faith in Him would be assailed. That day has come. Because they cannot understand how Christ rose again, men are saying that the Resurrection is an impossibility, and this they try to prove in books and papers that are read by men, women and children of every class, in every country, of every shade of religions belief.

As children of the Catholic Church, we must be on our guard against the unbelief of the day in every shape. But most of all must we fear and fly from anything that would shake our faith in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. If that goes, all must go. If that goes, we are no longer Christians, for it is our faith in the Resurrection that makes us followers of Christ. We are not disciples of a dead but of a living Man, the God Man Jesus Christ, yesterday, today, and for ever.

We believe in this wonderful Mystery because the Holy Scripture, which is the word of God, affirms it, and because the Church of God has taught it from the beginning. But we may strengthen our faith and meet the objections of those who try to shake it by considering two points about the Resurrection: Men are to be found now who say that our Lord was not really dead upon the cross, and, therefore, could not rise again. Now, both pagan and Jewish writers declare that Jesus Christ was put to death by Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberias Caesar. The piercing of the sacred Side proves His death; so do the words of the centurion to Pilate, and Pilate's gift of the body to Joseph of Arimathea, whilst the precautions of the priests make both His Death and Resurrection as clear as day to all but such as will not see.

Again, the wonderful change in the Apostles proves the truth of the Resurrection. They never so much as dreamed of their Master rising again. After His death they were utterly disconsolate and hopeless, hiding away within barred doors, afraid to show themselves abroad. A few weeks later these cowardly men were proclaiming the Resurrection boldly. No fear of their rulers nor of torments nor of death could silence them:

"Jesus of Nazareth, whom you by the hands of wicked men have crucified and slain—this Jesus hath God raised again, whereof all we are witnesses," said Peter in his first sermon to the Jews.

Standing a little later before Annas and Caiaphas to answer for his boldness in healing a cripple in the Name of Jesus, he said:

"Ye princes of the people and ancients, hear. Be it known to you all and to all the people of Israel, that by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God hath raised from the dead, even by Him, this man standeth before you whole."

Think of Peter, poor, trembling Peter, who at the first word of a servant girl had denied his Master, speaking in this strain before the dreaded Sanhedrin! How he insists. How little he cares what they do to him. And when he and John are forbidden to teach any more in the Name of Jesus, their only answer to the Council is:

"If it be just to hear you rather than God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard." To witness to this truth, and preach to all men Jesus crucified and risen again, the Apostles gave up friends and country, embraced a life of hardship and suffering, and at length joyfully laid down their lives.

Acts 4.

Would they have done this had the Resurrection been a fable? Our faith is built upon the Resurrection; that is, it rests upon this great truth as a house on its foundation. Take away the foundation and the building falls to the ground. Give up faith in the Resurrection and belief in all other articles of the Creed breaks down. We believe them on the word of Jesus, and we believe in Jesus because of the Resurrection. The Gospel is sometimes called "the preaching of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ." This was the proof He gave to friends and enemies that He was God. It was this wonderful fact that made the first Christians by bringing such multitudes into the Church at Pentecost. It was to commemorate Christ's rising from the dead that the first day of the week, Sunday, the Lord's Day, was appointed by the Apostles to take the place of the Jewish Sabbath.

Many men have worked miracles in His Name and have even raised the dead to life. But no mere man has ever raised himself to life. This God alone could do. Jesus Christ alone could say: "I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it up again." His Resurrection, then, proves Him to be God. If He is God, then all He has taught is true. We must believe in Him and we must do all He has commanded us.

There is no article of our Creed that we should say with more triumph and joy than this: "The third day He rose again from the dead." And with more hope. For it is because of the Resurrection of our Head that we, the members, look for our own and say: "I believe in the Resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Amen." But we must go back to the Appearances of our Lord to His disciples, by which He confirmed their faith in this

astounding Mystery. When during forty days they saw Him, touched Him, heard Him, ate with Him, they could no longer doubt the reality of the Resurrection. He was as real a person to them as Peter or John; He might be looked for at any moment; they could put their questions and difficulties to Him as before.

About a week after the Resurrection the Eleven left Judea for Galilee. They were glad to go north. Jerusalem had few happy memories for them. There the Lord had suffered and died. His enemies were there and more infuriated than ever since His Resurrection from the dead. It was by the simple folk of Galilee that He had been most followed and loved. Everything there the mountains, the fields, the highways spoke to them of Him. And above all, the Lake. On its beach they had received their call to follow Him and become fishers of men. There He had spoken the first parables and worked many of His deeds of mercy. He had stilled its storms and come to them across its waters. What wonder that they were glad to find themselves once more on the shores of that dear Lake!

It was strange to go back to nets and fishing after that marvellous Pasch; but they were poor men, and had to live by their labour. And so when Peter said one evening:

"I go a-fishing," six of them answered: "We also come with thee." One of them was Thomas. He had learned his lesson; he was not going to lose a chance again by separating himself from the rest. They put to sea and laboured all night, but caught nothing. The sun was rising next morning when, through the light mist, they saw a Figure standing on the shore, and heard a Voice calling:

"Children, have you any meat?" The weary men answered: "No." "Cast the net on the right side of the ship," said the Voice, "and you shall find." They obeyed, suspecting nothing. But when the net sank heavily, and they were scarcely able to draw it for the multitude of fishes, John said to Peter:

"It is the Lord!" In an instant Peter was over the side of the boat and making for land with all his might. The six came up presently in the boat dragging the net with fishes. As soon as they came to land, they saw hot coals lying, and a fish laid thereon, and bread. Jesus said to them:

"Bring hither of the fishes which you have now caught." Simon Peter went up and drew the net to land full of great fishes, one hundred and fifty-three; and, although there were so many, the net was not broken. Jesus said to them:

"Come and dine." Tired and hungry, they stretched themselves on the beach. And He went in and out among them giving them fish and bread. They looked at Him in silent wonder; looked at the Wounds in His feet and hands. They listened to Him, took food from His hands, touched Him as He went past. And when He came and sat down amongst them as in the old days, and the fresh morning breeze stirred His hair, and there were the sweet words and ways that belonged to Him alone, revealing Him every moment—what more

could they want to convince them of the truth of His own words on the Day of the Resurrection:

"It is I Myself?" St. John, who was there, tells us that "none of them who were at meat durst ask Him: "Who art Thou?" knowing that it was the Lord. He goes on to tell us what happened after that early dinner. When they had dined Jesus said to Simon Peter:

"Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me more than these?" He said to Him: "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." He said to him: "Feed My lambs." He said to him again: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" He said to Him: "Yea, Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee." He said to him: "Feed My lambs." He said to him the third time: "Simon, son of John, lovest thou Me?" Peter was grieved because He had said to him the third time: "Lovest thou Me?" and he said to Him: "Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." He said to him: "Feed My sheep."

Our Lord would give Peter the opportunity of making reparation by three professions of love for his three denials. And He asked him for a greater love than the rest, because of the greater trust that was to be committed to him—the charge of the whole flock.

The Church, as you will remember, consists of two classes, the Teaching and the taught. The taught are the simple faithful, whom our Lord calls the lambs; the sheep who look after the lambs are the bishops; they make up the Church teaching. Over all Peter is set as Shepherd. Teachers as well as taught, bishops and priests as well as the simple laity, are to look for guidance to Peter and his successors. As in the East a flock is kept together by following the shepherd, who walks on in front and leads it, so the flock of Christ is to be kept united by obeying its chief Shepherd the Pope; who is the successor of Peter and the Vicar of Christ.

"Go, tell His disciples and Peter," the Angel said to the women at the Sepulchre. Why "and Peter?" Was he not one of the disciples? Yes, but the first among them, who had charge of the rest and had to confirm them. This he did on the very Day of the Resurrection. And with wonderful success. What was an "idle tale," when told by the women, was the truth indeed when it came from Peter: "The Lord is risen indeed and hath appeared to Simon."

We must not think that the Gospels give us all the Appearances of our Lord to the Apostles after His Resurrection. St. John tells us expressly:

"Many other signs did Jesus in the sight of His disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His Name." St. Luke says: "He showed Himself alive after His Passion by many proofs, for forty days appearing to His disciples and speaking to them of the Kingdom of God," that is, the Church, which our Lord often called by this name.

In one of these Appearances He was seen by more than five hundred disciples at once. This

Appearance on the mountain was the only one of which the time and place were known beforehand. Here our Lord was to meet His own by appointment. From all parts — Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee—they flocked to the spot, full of joyful expectation. And there, in presence of this large number of believers, He gave to the Apostles the solemn commission to teach the whole world.

And Jesus coming spoke to them, saying:

"All power is given to Me in Heaven and in earth. Going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptising them in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and behold I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world."