

Little Flowers of St. Francis – The Prophet – Chapter 8 – page 579-581

How Saint Francis explained those things that are perfect joy

As Saint Francis was once going with Brother Leo from Perugia to Saint Mary of the Angels in wintertime, and the very great cold stung him sharply, he called Brother Leo, who was walking in front and said this to him: “Brother Leo, if it should happen that the Lesser Brothers in every land should give great example of holiness and give good edifications, nonetheless write and note carefully that perfect joy is not in that.” And walking along further Saint Francis called him a second time: “O Brother Leo, even if a Lesser Brother gives sight to *the blind*, straightens the crippled, drives out the attacks of demons, restores hearing to *the deaf* and walking to the lame, speech to the mute and, what is even a greater thing, raises those *dead* for four days, write that perfect joy is not in that.” And walking on a little, Saint Francis cried out loudly, “O Brother Leo, if a Lesser Brother knew all *languages*, all the sciences and all the Scriptures, if he knew how to *prophecy* and reveal, not only future things, but also the secrets of consciences and people, write that perfect joy is not in that.” Walking on a bit further Saint Francis cried out even louder, O Brother Leo, little lamb of God, even though a Lesser Brother may *speak with the tongue of an angel*, and know the courses of the stars and the powers of herbs, and all the treasures of the earth were revealed to him, and he knew the virtues of birds, *fish* and all animals and stones and waters, write that perfect joy is not in that.” And walking along a bit, Saint Francis cried out loudly, “O Brother Leo, even if a Lesser Brother knew how to preach so well that he converts all the unbelievers to the faith of Christ, write that perfect joy is not in that.”

This way of taking had lasted for a good two miles, when Brother Leo with great amazement asked him and said, “Father, I ask you, for the sake of God, to tell me where perfect joy is.” And Saint Francis replied to him, “when we come to Saint Mary of the Angels, soaked with rain like this and frozen from the cold and covered with mud and suffering from hunger, and we knock at the door of the place, and the porter comes out angrily and says, ‘Who are you?’ and we say, ‘We are two of your brothers.’ And he says, ‘You’re not telling the truth: you two are scoundrels who go around tricking people and stealing the alms of the poor. Go away,’ and he doesn’t open for us, and makes us stay outside in the snow and water, cold and hungry until nighttime, when we patiently endure such insults and cruelty and abuses without becoming upset or complaining about him, and think humbly that that porter in fact recognizes us, that it is God who makes him speak against us: O Brother Leo, write that here is perfect joy. And if we even continue knocking and he comes out upset, and drives us away with curses and blows, like aggravating vagrants, saying, ‘Get out of here, you dirty little thieves, go to the hospital, because you’re not going to eat here or stay here;’ if we endure this patiently and with happiness and good love, O Brother Leo, write that here is perfect joy. And if, driven by hunger and cold and night, we knock even more and call out and beg for the love of God with loud crying that he open the door for us and let us at least come inside, and he becomes angrier and says, ‘These are aggravating vagrants, I’ll pay them well for what they’re worth.’ And comes outside with a knobby stick and grabs us by the capuche and throws us on the ground and rolls us in the snow and beats us from head to toe with that stick; if we endure these things patiently and with happiness, thinking of the sufferings of the blessed Christ, which we must endure for His love, O Brother Leo, write that here and in this place is perfect joy. But hear the conclusion, Brother Leo. Above all the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which Christ grants to His friends, is that of conquering our own selves and gladly, for the love of Christ, to endure sufferings, injuries and insults and difficulties, because we cannot glory in all the other gifts of God, since they are not ours but God’s, as the Apostle says, ‘*What do you have that you do not have from God, and if you have had it from Him, why do you boast of it, as if you had it from yourself?*’ BUT in the cross of trouble and affliction we can glory, as the Apostle says, ‘*I do not want to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*’”

CHRIST IS RISEN! ALLELUIA!

Christ's Resurrection is an object of faith in that it is a transcendent intervention of God himself in creation and history. —CCC, no. 648

When we speak of the Paschal Mystery, we refer to Christ's death and Resurrection as one inseparable event. It is a mystery because it is a visible sign of an invisible act of God. It is paschal because it is Christ's passing through death into new life. For us it means that we can now die to sin and its domination of our lives, and we pass over into divine life already here on earth and more completely in heaven. Death is conquered in the sense that not only do our souls survive physical death, but even our bodies will rise again at the end of time at the Last Judgment and resurrection of the dead.

The Resurrection narratives in all four Gospels—though differing in details because of varying viewpoints of the different authors—maintain a similar structure in the narration of the events. At dawn on the Sunday after Christ's death, Mary Magdalene and a companion go to the tomb to anoint the dead body of Jesus. They find the tomb is empty. They meet an angel who proclaims the Resurrection of Jesus: "He is not here, for he has been raised" (Mt 28:6). They are told to bring the Good News to the Apostles. Mary Magdalene leads the way and is celebrated in the liturgy of the Church as the first witness to the Resurrection.

Next come the appearance narratives when Jesus appears to the Apostles and disciples in a number of instances. St. Paul summarizes these appearances in his first Letter to the Corinthians (cf. 1 Cor 15:3-8). Finally, the disciples are commissioned to bring the Gospel to the world.

While the empty tomb of itself does not prove the Resurrection, since the absence of Christ's body could have other explanations, it is an essential part of the proclamation of the Resurrection because it demonstrates the fact of what God has done in raising his Son from the dead in his own body. When St. John entered the empty tomb, "He saw and believed" (Jn 20:8).

A TRANSCENDENT EVENT

The reality of Christ's Resurrection is also something beyond the realm of history. No one saw the actual Resurrection. No evangelist describes it. No one can tell us how it physically happened. No one perceived how the earthly body of Christ passed over into a glorified form. Despite the fact that the risen Jesus could be seen, touched, heard, and dined with, the Resurrection remains a mystery of faith that transcends history.

Its transcendent quality can also be inferred from the state of Christ's risen body. He was not a ghost; Jesus invited them to touch him. He asked for a piece of fish to show them that he could eat. He spent time with them, often repeating teachings from the days before the Passion but now in the light of the Resurrection. Nor was it a body like that of Lazarus, which would die again. His risen body would never die. Christ's body was glorified; it is not confined by space or time. He could appear and disappear before the Apostles' eyes. Closed doors did not bar his entry. It is a real body, but glorified, not belonging to earth but to the Father's realm. It is a body transformed by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 15:42-44). The Holy Spirit "gave life to Jesus' dead humanity and called it to the glorious state of Lordship" (CCC, no. 648).

What do we learn from Christ's Resurrection? If Jesus had not risen, our faith would mean nothing. St. Paul makes this clear in his first Letter to the Corinthians: "But if Christ is preached as raised from the dead, how can some among you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then neither has Christ been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then empty, too, is our preaching; empty, too, your faith" (1 Cor 15:12-14). We also learn that, by raising him from the dead, the Father has placed his seal upon the work accomplished by his only begotten Son through his Passion and death. We see now the fullness of Jesus' glory as Son of God and Savior.

THE SACRAMENT OF ANOINTING OF THE SICK

313. How was sickness viewed in the Old Testament?

In the Old Testament sickness was experienced as a sign of weakness and at the same time perceived as mysteriously bound up with sin. The prophets intuited that sickness could also have a redemptive value for one's own sins and those of others. Thus sickness was lived out in the presence of God from whom people implored healing.

314. What is the significance of Jesus' compassion for the sick?

The compassion of Jesus toward the sick and his many healings of the infirm were a clear sign that with him had come the Kingdom of God and therefore victory over sin, over suffering, and over death. By his own passion and death he gave new meaning to our suffering which, when united with his own, can become a means of purification and of salvation for us and for others.

315. What is the attitude of the Church toward the sick?

Having received from the Lord the charge to heal the sick, the Church strives to carry it out by taking care of the sick and accompanying them with her prayer of intercession. Above all, the Church possesses a sacrament specifically intended for the benefit of the sick. This sacrament was instituted by Christ and is attested by Saint James: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call in the presbyters of the Church and let them pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord" (*James 5:14-15*).

316. Who can receive the sacrament of the anointing of the sick?

Any member of the faithful can receive this sacrament as soon as he or she begins to be in danger of death because of sickness or old age. The faithful who receive this sacrament can receive it several times if their illness becomes worse or another serious sickness afflicts them. The celebration of this sacrament should, if possible, be preceded by individual confession on the part of the sick person.

317. Who administers this sacrament?

This sacrament can be administered only by priests (bishops or presbyters).

318. How is this sacrament celebrated?

The celebration of this sacrament consists essentially in an *anointing* with oil which may be blessed by the bishop. The anointing is on the forehead and on the hands of the sick person (in the Roman rite) or also on other parts of the body (in the other rites) accompanied by the *prayer* of the priest who asks for the special grace of this sacrament.

319. What are the effects of this sacrament?

This sacrament confers a special grace which unites the sick person more intimately to the Passion of Christ for his good and for the good of all the Church. It gives comfort, peace, courage, and even the forgiveness of sins if the sick person is not able to make a confession. Sometimes, if it is the will of God, this sacrament even brings about the restoration of physical health. In any case this Anointing prepares the sick person for the journey to the Father's House.

320. What is Viaticum?

Viaticum is the Holy Eucharist received by those who are about to leave this earthly life and are preparing for the journey to eternal life. Communion in the body and blood of Christ who died and rose from the dead, received at the moment of passing from this world to the Father, is the seed of eternal life and the power of the resurrection.

Psalm 139:1-18,23-24

O LORD, you have searched
me and known me!
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from afar.
You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.
You beset me behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is high, I cannot attain it.

Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.
If I say, "Let only darkness cover me,
and the light about me be night."
even the darkness is not dark to you,
the night is bright as the day;
for darkness is as light with you.

For you formed my inward parts,
you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you, for I am wondrously made. Wonderful are your works!
You know me right well;
my frame was not hidden from you,
when I was being made in secret,
intricately wrought in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my unformed substance;
in your book were written, every one of them,
the days that were formed for me,
when as yet there was none of them.
How precious to me are your thoughts,
O God! How vast is the sum of them!
If I would count them, they are more than the sand.
When I awake, I am still with you.

Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any wicked
way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!