

The Empty Tomb—Open Gate of Heaven!

By Anand Peter

At the outset, please accept my best wishes for a blessed Easter 2021.

We can shout as much as we want, 'The Lord has risen. He is risen, indeed.' When we stop for a moment and think about it, the question that arises is: what does Easter mean for all of us? I admit, without any hesitation, that it is indeed a statement of fact. But repeatedly saying so, once a year, seems to be performing a ritual. My understanding is that my Lord, Jesus, did not look very kindly upon rituals. The question, then, is: how do we celebrate His resurrection? Choose your answer carefully, because how you celebrate Easter is an indicator of your potential as a student of Jesus.

The Holy Week was filled with powerful images of the Christian life. Jesus gave us a covenant meal, a sacrament, on Thursday night — the very night He was betrayed. He suffered torture and death on Friday, a substitutionary death that paid the price for the sins of humanity and opened up the possibility of forgiveness to all who ask. In doing so, He kicked in the gates of hell. And, of course, on Sunday He fulfilled His prophecy that He would rise again on the third day. His companions did not understand the import of His prophecy then — do we understand it today?

Let us go back a little, to Friday. Let us not put away those events leading to His crucifixion — horribly distasteful as they were — as something we do not want to think about; rather, we must recall and 'celebrate' His death. His death on the cross is unique, because of who He is: the sinless, perfect Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. No one else could have accomplished what Jesus accomplished on the cross, because His perfect sacrifice came by virtue of His identity as God the Son. His sacrifice was for the sin of all people, in all times and all places. His death was unique, once and for all. But I would like to ask a difficult question: is Friday's sacrifice enough?

When we concentrate on the substitutionary death of Jesus, to the exclusion of His life and teaching, we limit His ministry to a divine 'rescue mission' that only becomes effective for us when we cross over. Apart from gratitude for His kindness, there is little connection between what Jesus did then and how we live today. Our appreciation for what He did does not, of itself, empower us to fulfil His teaching; our gratitude for His suffering does not release the wisdom, insight, or strength for each one of us to live as a new creation, a new kind of person. That, first of all, released us from the curse of eternal death and entrapment in hell.

The key to the question — is Friday's sacrifice enough? — is found in His resurrection. On Easter Sunday, Jesus opened not only the tomb, but also new possibilities for everyone who would follow Him. Do not merely look at His resurrection as a supernatural event, and go on proclaiming it as such. His resurrection opened up the 'resources of heaven' for all who would follow Him: He defeated Satan, death, and hell, and opened the gates of heaven. Do not tell me that no one has seen the gates of Heaven; Mary Magdalene and the other women accompanying her did, and Peter and John did also. Why look in

and say only that it was an empty tomb? Why do we not see the entrance to the tomb as the open gate of Heaven?

Picture Jesus emerging from the garden tomb: something new came forth that day — the power of resurrection life, operating in human beings. Resurrection life flowed into Jesus that day, but Scripture reveals that, through His grace, it has flowed into all who accept Him. Paul understood the secret of the resurrection fully, and wrote in Romans 8:11-14: "But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you. Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." These verses are not about being raised after we die; they are about the power of the resurrection working in us now. Jesus was not only our model during His earthly life, but He is also a model of new creation operating within us even now.

This Easter Sunday, we must make a choice: are we celebrating sacrifice apart from empowerment? If we are celebrating both, let us shut ourselves in our rooms and meditate on how, from now on, we might engage with the empowerment we have received because of the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.