

O Felix Culpa:

The Victory of God's Love

FOR CHRISTIANS AROUND THE WORLD, THE FIFTY DAYS THAT BEGIN WITH THE SOLEMNITY OF THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD, KNOWN AS THE EASTER SEASON*, IS A TIME OF GREAT JOY

By Robert White

The joy of Easter is based not on the beauty of the change of seasons and the budding life in nature, nor is it based on some fleeting experience of joy after completing forty days of abstinence during the Season of Lent; rather, this joy finds its source in the deep well-spring of God's gracious eternal effecting of redemption and salvation. In fact, one can say that the joy of Easter is one that transcends the limits of human perspective, because this joy is a gift – a gift offered by the same One who yearns for the completion of the transformation of humanity and the natural world.

Joy despite crisis

This joy does not depend on the particular emotional disposition of the believer, nor does it depend on the external historical circumstances in which we find ourselves. It is a joy that does not deny the reality of the tragic suffering in the world or the political and economic crises that adversely affect so many, nor does it function as a temporary escape from the present frustrations, addictions and brokenness with which women and men live their daily lives. This joy is a deeply treasured memory and a persevering trust in the fulfillment of God's promise to transform life both now and after the end of our time on earth. Ultimately, this joy is rooted in the Lord, who remains faithful forever and steadfast in his love for us. It is joyful confidence that the victory of Christ over death and over our sinfulness will one day extend through all of God's creation.

*** The Easter Season, or Eastertide, begins on Easter Day and lasts 50 days, ending on Pentecost. The 2009 dates are 12 April and 31 May.**

Photos:

Jesus pulls Adam and Eve from Hell in 'Harrowing of Hell and Resurrection', a mediaeval Byzantine fresco from the Anastasis of the Chora Church/Museum, Istanbul (Gunnar Bach Pedersen)



Promise fulfilled

It is a joy hopeful in that which cannot now be touched, seen or heard, but what God has promised for those who love him. As the Apostle Paul wrote in his Second Letter to the Christian Church in Corinth:

But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being given up to death for the sake of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh. (2 Corinthians 4: 7-11).

A seed well-watered

And thus the most profound meaning of the annual celebration of Easter reveals the Christian confidence in the victory of God's love despite our weakness and even our sinfulness. Like the seed that bears much fruit at the harvest if it has been well watered, the soil in which it was planted is nourishing and the weather provides adequate conditions to promote its growth, the Christian believes that participation in the Easter mysteries of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection is our burial in the fertile soil and flowing waters of the transformative grace of God that will cause and effect our redemption. We are not left alone to make everything better, we are not asked to fix ourselves and solve all of our problems; rather, it is God who redeems us,

who releases us, who saves us.

Infinite good, unbound by evil

From the earliest times of the Church, there has been a tradition which calls the original fall of man in the transgression of our first parents, the 'happy fault' or 'fortunate sin'. This tradition actually is referred to during the chanting at the most solemn of all of the liturgical celebrations of the year: the Easter Vigil at sundown on the night before Easter Sunday. It is on this night that the Church sings of the 'felix culpa' of Adam that caused the Father to reveal his great mercy through the ministry and life-giving death of Christ his Son. The 'felix culpa' is not a celebration of the sin, nor is it relativism regarding the choices that we make that are contrary to the command of God for the good of others or ourselves; rather, it is a proclamation of faith in God, whose mercy and love are greater and more powerful than us. It is recognition of the fact that God's goodness is not bound by our evil, it is the good news that God's love is unconditional and that nothing can separate from the love of God who has raised his Son in the power of the Spirit. As Saint Paul writes in the Letter to the Church of Rome: "in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who has loved us" (Romans 8: 37). ■

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