

"Christ is risen - alleluia." That's the common Easter greeting and response in the Eastern churches - much as we might say "Happy Easter - may happy returns." So today, with the observance of Lent and the celebration of Christ's Paschal Mystery over the week-end, behind us, I greet you with a message of joy and hope - Christ is risen, alleluia. The piece of music I've chosen to begin Midday Prayers with during this Easter season, carries the same message - it is an antiphon repeated throughout Easter week ~~at~~ Mass and in the divine office; from Ps 117, a processional psalm of praise: "This day was made by the Lord; we rejoice and are glad." The day isn't just Easter Sunday, alone; the celebration of Christ's passover really runs from now until Pentecost - it is all the one feast, Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and sending the Holy Spirit from His Father's side where He's now in glory. The "day" is eternal - it knows no night: His risen life knows no rise or death. It is the Lord's day; and it's ours too, to rejoice and be glad because He is risen for us, has now given us a part in his triumph of love over evil, a share in his risen life, which is a pledge of everlasting life for each of us who pass through death with Him. "Xt will be, before me, behind me, in me, beneath me, above me, on my right on my left, Xt when I lie, when I sit, when I arise, Xt in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Xt in the mouth of every man who speaks of me, Xt in every eye that sees me, Xt in every ear that hears me."

R21 (Gregorian
to 178)

Listen now, with a prayer of thanksgiving to God for what He has done for us to an early 11th Century easter hymn, which is still recited at Mass throughout Easter week: Victimæ Pascali laudes (Cod. Pr. p 558)

The Roman Liturgy uses the same Eucharistic prayer (what we call the Canon of the Mass) throughout the year, with only an occasional seasonal variation. For Easter there is an addition: "In union with the whole Church we celebrate the day when Jesus Christ, Our Lord, rose in the flesh." Those last 3 words, in the flesh, pull no punches as a declaration of our faith in Christ's resurrection. It is his human body, tortured and hung on the cross at Calvary, that has risen from death and been glorified. He is alive, he is risen (not just has risen), a new man, with a new life which is not subject to material limitations, the distressing effects of human sinfulness, or death. He is risen, the first-fruits of those who have to die, the head of a new mankind with a new, transformed meaningful life. The early Christian community at Corinth, a big sea-port not unlike Hong Kong today, had some difficulties and arguments about their members who had died - they weren't quite sure of their fate: and they told St. Paul, who'd brought Xt. to them, about their difficulty. He was quite firm and forthright in his reply, which is preserved in one of his letters. Of course they will rise again, he says. If they can't, then Christ didn't rise either: and if Christ didn't rise from death, then there's no point in being a Christian - faith is worthless, stupid, foolish and we're all wasting our time, we're just hopelessly sunk in sinfulness, without any way of approaching God or of being with Him for whom we're made.

But X^t. has risen - and this is what makes all the difference. By rising from death in his own flesh, he's opened a way for every man to come to God his Father. Human life is no longer necessarily subject to the fatality or finality of death. It has a reality - and through X^t. it has the possibility of its fulfillment and happiness in the life of God himself, at His side. Christ's resurrection has literally vital importance for the world - it is a message to all men, of hope and joy; and it's got to be carried by us who have heard and who believe.

This is the time to renew and deepen our own faith in what Christ's passion means for us. And this is best done in prayer, by prayerful reading of what the 4 gospels tell us, and of how the first apostles preached about X^t, an account you'll find in the Acts of the Apostles. Their message was based entirely on the fact that X^t who died, is alive and has gone before us back to His Father, giving ^{us} the news, the life by which we can enter into God's family & be at home there.

Prayer of Sunday, Easter Week.