

# THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD

ANNO † DOMINI 2022

*Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.*

*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*

—1 Corinthians 5:7

We've been doing some spring cleaning at our house. My wife has been hard at work planting flowers in the garden beds out front. I've been doing some lawn work and tidying up here and there. And the kids have been "helping."

I learned this week that spring cleaning is a tradition that goes back thousands of years to the time of the ancient Hebrews. In fact, it's a story you're probably familiar with. In the twelfth chapter of the Book of Exodus, God instructs Moses to tell the people of Israel, Jacob's descendants, who have been slaves in Egypt for more than 400 years, to take lambs, male and without blemish, and kill them. They are to take the blood of the lambs and use it to mark the doors of their houses, staying inside until the morning. "For the Lord will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood...[He] will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you" (vv. 12, 13). The lamb itself is to be roasted on the fire and eaten. "In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand" (v. 11). They had to be ready to go. This was it. God was finally going to bring His people out of Egypt, out of slavery. There was no going back. Which is why they also were to remove leaven out of their houses (v. 15). No yeast. No time! Their redemption was at hand. And since this was to be for them a memorial day, a festival to the Lord, when it was time to celebrate the anniversary of the Passover, which is in the spring, the people and their descendants would *clean out* the old leaven. Whence came spring cleaning.

In today's Epistle, the apostle Paul uses this cleansing aspect of the Passover to address a problem that's come up in the Church at Corinth. He writes, "Your boasting is not good" (1 Corinthians 5:6). What were they boasting about? Paul summarizes in 5:1, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among the pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant!" This is apparently what the ancient Corinthians were like: proud, competitive. They were the kind of people who would try to outdo one another at everything. But this? This was not good. This was *sin*; and not just sin, but *willful* sin, sin committed *on purpose* and celebrated. And it needed to stop.

"Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?" (5:6). Paul likes to anticipate objections to what he's going to say, and this is one of them. Something

along the lines of, "Oh, what harm can a little sin do?" That's why he chooses the image of leaven. In a parable, Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened" (Matthew 13:33). That's what leaven does. You use it in baking. It makes the dough rise. But here, Paul is using leaven as an image for *sin*. Jesus also said, "Beware the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1), the point being that even a little sin can have a big effect on our faith. It can grow and grow until it has leavened the whole lump, leaving nothing *but* sin. That's what *this* man's sin was threatening to do to him and to his congregation. "Do not be deceived," Paul writes toward the end of his letter: "Bad company ruins good morals" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

So, he says, time for some spring cleaning! "Clean out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened" (5:7a). The sin has to go. It cannot stay. It is *dangerous*. And it's not who they are. Their sin has already been purged. "You really are unleavened," he says. There's no going back. "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (5:7b). God has been doing some spring cleaning Himself.

One day, when John the Baptizer saw Jesus coming toward him, he said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). Paul, who was well-versed in the Old Testament, joins the prophet in comparing Jesus to the Passover lambs that were sacrificed on the eve of the Exodus. Like them, Jesus was without blemish, a male of but 33 years. He, too, was sacrificed. His holy, precious blood was shed, marking the wood of the cross. And with His wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). When God the Father saw the blood shed for the sin of the world, He *passed over* us, the debt having been paid in full. Christ Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree (1 Peter 2:24). There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1). Your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for (Isaiah 6:7). You really are unleavened, all you who believe, who claim that blood for yourself.

And this we know, because not only has Christ, our Passover Lamb, been sacrificed, but Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!** God raised Him from the dead on the third day, and this definitely proves that He is God's Son. "[He was] declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). It also proves that His Word is *truth*. He said, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19). They destroyed it, and He did arise; hence Christ is no liar. It proves that God has *accepted* His Son's sacrifice for the sin of the world. It was enough. "Truly no man can ransom another, or give to God the price of His life" (Psalm 49:7). But Jesus can. His blood is good, *better* than the blood of lambs, so that we can say with confidence that He was delivered up for our offenses and was raised up for our justification (Romans 4:25). We are

completely clean in God's sight. And the resurrection proves that because Jesus lives, we too shall live (John 14:19). And not in some disembodied state, which is *not* living, but just as *He* is risen: in a glorified body, imperishable. "For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53). If Christ has been raised, then there is such a thing as the resurrection of the dead, and Christ, who is the Resurrection and the Life, has the power to raise *us* from death and to give us eternal life, and He has promised to do this (John 10:28).

"Let us therefore celebrate the festival," concludes Paul, "not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil," not with the *intention* of sinning, of going back to the way things were before, like nothing has changed, "but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (5:8), with an honest confession of our sin, with an earnest desire to do better, and with a thankful heart to God for all His gifts, freely given. Easter changes *everything*; so, cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened.

And to help you with your spring cleaning, the Lord invites you to draw near and take His body and blood, roasted in God's wrath and served up for us Christians to eat and to drink. The Lord's Supper is no mere symbol of remembrance, but Christ, our Passover Lamb, is *here*, as He says, "Take, eat; this *is* My body...Drink of it, all of you; this *is* My blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Let us not be arrogant, presuming to approach the Lord's Table on the basis of our *own* worthiness, but let the one who boasts, boast in the *Lord*, because it is by *His* merits, who died and rose again for us, that we are redeemed from our slavery to sin and rescued from our taskmasters, death and the devil.

"Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21). Just as God brought the Israelites out of slavery to be His people, we are not just saved *from* something, we are saved *for* something: for service and for witness. Cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, we go out joyfully loving God and serving our neighbor, proclaiming His righteousness and that He has done it. God has saved us. Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed! Alleluia!**

It feels good to be clean, doesn't it?

In ☩ Jesus' name. Amen.

*Soli Deo gloria*