THE FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD
Holy Cross -- 1993

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IN NOMINE JESU

I CORINTHIANS 15: 17,18,20 IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED, YOUR FAITH IS FUTILE AND YOU ARE STILL IN YOUR SINS. THEN THOSE ALSO WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP IN CHRIST HAVE PERISHED.....BUT IN FACT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!

You remember PONTIUS PILATE. He has so large a part in the CREED and in the PASSION STOR He was a man who had POWER and was PROUD OF IT. His job was to maintain the DIGNITY OF THE EMPIRE and the MIGHT OF CAESAR among a CONQUERED PEOPLE. But there came a day when, in spite of his POWER, he became UNEASY and WORRIED and ALL HIS PEOPLE with him! "PILATE YOU HAVE TO DO SOMETHING! NOW THAT JESUS IS DEAD AND BURIED AND FINISHED AND PUT IN THE GRAVE -- TO MAKE SURE THERE ARE NO TRICKS -- YOU MUST DO SOMETHING, PILATE, -- YOU MUST TAKE PRECAUTIONS!"..... And then comes the MOST PATHETIC SENTENCE ever spoken: "YOU HAVE A WATCH -- GO YOUR WAY -- MAKE THE TOMB AS SURE AS YOU CAN!" .....The man was MAD! If you saw a man standing in the GRAY OF DAWN shouting at the SUN, "YOU CANNOT RISE!" you would perhaps understand about this ROMAN who thought he could BARRICADE the TOMB OF CHRI

EVERY EASTER is the SAME -- ALWAYS the QUESTION: "IS IT TRUE? DID IT HAPPEN?" What if by any chance WE ARE MISTAKEN? -- IF PILATE was not quite SO PATHETIC after all? IT IS A HORRIBLE, DISMAL IDEA! It sends SHUDDERS UP AND DOWN THE SPINE! St. Paul makes us face the prospect: "WHAT IF CHRIST IS NOT RAISED?"

First, your FAITH IS FUTILE! All the TRUST you put in God -- ONE HUGE MISTAKE! All the BRAVE CONFIDENCE -- SMASHED, WRECKED FOREVER! WHY? Because JESUS who lived an ABSOLUTELY PERFECT LIFE --- CRUCIFIED, DEAD, BURIED and THAT'S ALL! JESUS -- TRUSTING God would DELIVER HIM -- BELIEVING that God would "NOT LEAVE HIS SOUL IN HELL NOR SUFFER HIS HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION" --- and GOD DOING NOTHING! St. Paul says you CANNOT TRUST GOD AFTER THAT -- neither HIS LOVE nor HIS POWER.

YOU CANNOT TRUST HIS LOVE! Mary Webb, in her book, "PRECIOUS BANE" talks about a woman with a great heart who says, "IT ALWAYS SEEMED A STRANGE THING TO ME THAT THE MOTHER OF JESUS COULD KEEP HER HANDS OFF THE CENTURION, AND IT MUST HAVE BEEN BECAUSE HE TOLD HER TO. BUT IF IT HAD BEEN ME, I THINK I WOULD HAVE FORGOTTEN THE ORDERS." If that is true of HUMAN LOVE, how could GOD watch the TRAGEDY OF CALVARY and do nothing?..... They tell

the story of KING CLOVIS, the BARBARIAN, who heard a missionary reading the PASSION STORY and blurted out, "OH, IF ONLY I HAD BEEN THERE WITH MY FRANKS! WE WOULD HAVE CHARGED UP THE SLOPES AND TAUGHT THOSE ROMANS A LESSON." ... But if GOD, watching CALVARY, DID NOTHIN -- LEFT IT AT THAT -- and knew that THIS WAS THE END OF JESUS FOREVER -- then you can join Huxley in saying, "I FIND NOT ONE EVIDENCE THAT GOD IS LOVE!" "YOUR FAITH IS FUTILE!"

And you cannot TRUST HIS POWER either. The CLASH ON CALVARY is not only between JESUS and HIS ENEMIES, but between GOD AND THE DEMONIC -- WORLD POWERS are grappling here! If the CROSS IS THE END, you can hear the HOWLING HOSTS OF HELL yelling, "WE WIN! WE WIN!"..... "POWER?" says St. Paul, "IF CHRIST IS NOT RAISED, DON'T TELL ME GOD HAS ANY POWER... YOUR FAITH IS FUTILE!"

What about us? Is OUR FAITH IN GOD such an IMPORTANT THING that it would MATTER TO US if we LOST IT? I have no doubt that if "PUSH CAME TO SHOVE" we would all be ON OUR FEET in a minute, hollering at the top of our lungs,"LET THAT ALONE -- FOR GOD'S SAKE -- LEAVE ME THAT!" It does matter! We cannot live without it! AND IF CHRIST IS NOT RAISED, IT IS GONE!.....But IF CHRIST IS RISEN FROM THE DEAD, THEN OUR FAITH IS CROWNED -- JUSTIFIED -- VINDICATED ---- and in the DARKEST DAY of YOUR LIFE YOU ARE SAFE! ....."TELL ME." said one of Luther's enemies, "TELL ME, WHEN THE WHOLE WORLD TURNS AGAINST YOU -- THE CHURCH, STATE, PRINCES, PEOPLE -- WHERE WILL YOU BE THEN?" Luther answered calmly, "WHERE SHALL I BE THEN? -- WHY, THEN AS NOW, IN THE HANDS OF ALMIGHTY GOD."

Once more, St. Paul puts it to us: "IF CHRIST IS NOT RAISED, YOU ARE STILL IN YOUR SINS!" All the talk about being FORGIVEN is PURE DELUSION! All the NOBLE WORDS aboutGOD PUTTING OUR SINS BEHIND HIS BACK -- PURE MOCKERY! Why? Becuase IF THE CROSS IS THE END, Christ's BRAVE PATHETIC ATTEMPT to be a SAVIOR failed -- because the SINS OF THE PEOPLE WHO SLEW HIM had the last word -- because JESUS, SEEING THE DOWNWARD DRIFT of a hateful world, had tried to stop it and the TIDES OVERWHELMED HIM. Now there is NO ESCAPE from the CLUTCHING HAND OF THE PAST -- NO DELIVERANCE from the DOWNWARD DRAG OF OUR SOULS -- NO HOPE of being "PURCHASED AND WON BY THE PRECIOUS BLOOD OF CHRIST!" "YOU ARE STILL IN YOUR SINS!" ..... If FORGIVENESS GOES -- then PEACE goes and FREEDOM goes and HAPPINESS goes and HEAVEN goes FORGIVENESS DOES MATTER!..... King Herod killed JOHN THE BAPTIST in prison. Months later

he heard about JESUS and suddenly he trembled: "THIS MUST BE JOHN BACK AGAIN -- THE MAN I KILLED -- BACK FROM THE DEAD!" FORGIVENESS DOES MATTER -- so much so you cannot live without it. BUT IF CHRIST IS NOT RAISED, IT IS GONE! "BUT IF CHRIST IS RISEN, THEN SIN IS DEFEATED" and you can join in the great confession: "HE WAS DELIVERED FOR OUR OFFENSES, AND RAISED AGAIN FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION!"

Once more the apostle makes us face it: "IF CHRIST HAS NOT BEEN RAISED, THEN THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP IN CHRIST HAVE PERISHED!" Think about it! -- ALL THE BLESSED DEPARTED -- ANNIHILATED, DESTROYED FOREVER -- BLOWN OUT OF EXISTENCE as you would BLOW OUT A CANDLE -- CAST LIKE RUBBISH to the wind -- NEVER TO BE SEEN AGAIN! WHY? IF CHRIST NEVER ROSE, HOW SOULD THEY? If the ONE PERFECT LIFE which has ever appeared on the earth did NOT GET THROUGH THIS THING CALLED DEATH, How should anyone else?..... DOES IT MATTER? Or better still, DOES ANYTHING ELSE MATTER? As long as LOVE IS LOVE -- as long as ONE HUMAN HEART CLEAVES AND CLINGS TO ANOTHER, it does matter! You cannot live without it! When the day comes for YOU TO DIE, you will want the CHARIOTS OF GOD to carry you through -- you will want the ANGELS OF GOD to bring you home!..... But if "LIFE IS ONLY A TALE TOLD BY AN IDIOT, FULL OF SOUND AND FURY, SIGNIFYING NOTHING," then we can only say to God that it is CRUEL OF HIM to PUT SUCH LOVE IN OUR HEARTS and then SNAP IT OFF in the end..... "BUT IF CHRIST IS RAISED FROM THE DEAD, THEN THOSE WHO HAVE FALLEN ASLEEP IN JESUS ARE ALIVE!"

Like a TRUMPET CALL and a THUNDER CLAP the apostle shouts it out: "BUT IN FACT CHRIST HAS BEEN RAISED FROM THE DEAD!".... If you ask, PAUL, HOW DO YOU KNOW IT?" he answers, "KNOW IT -- I HAVE SPOKEN TO THE MEN WHO HAVE SEEN HIM -- PETER, ANDREW, JOHN -- AND A HUNDRED OTHERS!" But there's more: "HE STOPPED ME ON THE DAMASCUS ROAD AND HE HAS BEEN THE POWER OF MY LIFE EVER SINCE! IN FACT, IT IS NO LONGER I WHO LIVE, BUT CHRIST LIVES IN ME!"

You too can know HIS PRESENCE and HIS POWER and join SAVONAROLA in his dying hour: "YOU MAY KILL ME IF YOU PLEASE -- BUT YOU WILL NEVER, NEVER, NEVER TEAR THE LIVING CHRIST FROM MY HEART!"..... Now it is Easter.