

Conversion, Salvation, and Resurrection

Following from the previous topic of grace and the accepting and using God's grace is the method by which we are saved. Jesus ultimately paid the price so that we don't have to suffer as much for our sins. But that leaves a hole where we participate in God's saving mission. We are not pawns in his system, but co-redeemers with Christ. We are not forced into a life with God, but given the free-will to choose God and reject the Devil. In this way we must venture into our part in salvation history and how we participate in the saving mission of God.

Resurrection:

Unlike the other topics of this series in which I follow the progression forward from one idea to the next, in this topic I am going to explain them in reverse. The Resurrection of Jesus is the pivotal moment in the life of Jesus that validates everything that he taught and did. If Jesus died on the Cross and was buried with no Resurrection, then he would have been a prophet of great merit. Or, Jesus would have been a liar since he stated several times that he would rise on the third day. The teachings of Jesus were always validated by miracles to prove the teaching true. The same works for the Resurrection. The Resurrection of Jesus proved not only that his words are true but also that he is the Son of God, the one born from the Father before all ages, the one who sits at the Father's right hand, the one who is God. The second side to the Resurrection of Jesus is that it proved that there is more to this life than what we see and feel. Jesus showed the way to Heaven by rising from the dead. He also showed us that we can go to Heaven. This life is not all that there is: something more is coming.

The Resurrection of Jesus is highly important to us. Jesus could have ascended to the Father and left us below like showing us that his words are true but there is nothing more for us. Conversely, Jesus said many times that he is preparing a place for us or that we would rise like him. Therefore Jesus' Resurrection showed us what we were made to eventually experience. This tenant of the Christian faith gives meaning to life and purpose to following God's commands. Prior to the revelations of Jesus, the commands were followed simply to receive God's blessings and to remain his people. Jesus gave a new character to God's commands: those who follow God's commands will live forever with him in paradise. Jesus' Resurrection also shows us that the things of the world are passing away and something new is coming. We must wait in hope for the restoration of all things in Jesus. Yet, this is an "already but not yet" mentality. Jesus already conquered sin and death, but we don't experience the full effects of it quite yet.

Lastly, Jesus told us that we would also rise. The resurrection of all humans is complicated. When we rise from the dead, we will return to our bodies and be fully in God's light. The resurrection is not a mental or spiritual idea but a physical reality. As Jesus appeared after his Resurrection in a body, so too we will rise and be reunited with our bodies. Some people comment that this is weird. Why would we need our bodies in Heaven? We do need our bodies in Heaven. God didn't make us spiritual beings but body and soul beings. Our bodies help us in the worship of him, our bodies are the avenue through which we experience God, God created our bodies good, and our bodies are part of who we are. Therefore our bodies are necessary for the worship of God. In addition to that, our bodies will be glorified. The way we experience our

humanness right now will be different than how we experience it in Heaven. We will not have to deal with the limitations of human-ness such as weakness, sickness, and fatigue. Instead we will be in the fullness of our human bodies with the abilities to do everything with ease. Our bodies are important since God does not wastefully create. Therefore he intends for our bodies and souls to be one just like he did for Jesus at his Resurrection.

Salvation:

What is salvation? Salvation is the state of the soul in which it is perfectly united with God. Upon death we will be given the opportunity to be forgiven of all our sins and accepted into Heaven. Heaven is the place where the soul is perfectly united with God and can glorify God for eternity. Salvation is also the state of the soul in which it is freed from all sin and the body is freed from corruption.

The idea of salvation is used frequently in many Christian circles: “are you saved?” Some Christian groups claim that once you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior you are saved and nothing you do after that point can change your status of “being saved.” We as Catholics do not believe that one specific event done by us merits salvation. We have the possibility at any point in our life to lose the opportunity for salvation.

A person is saved by choosing to accept Jesus as his/her savior and desiring both his mercy and to live with him. If a one-time decision led to salvation, then this life is meaningless. We can do whatever we want after accepting Jesus into our lives without consequence. But this does not conform to Jesus’ words. Jesus makes the point that we need to follow God’s commands and do what he tells us. He also warns people about the consequences of not following God’s laws or continually falling into sin. These events show the importance of this life in helping us toward salvation and reminding us that this life has consequences. For that reason we do not believe that a one-time decision leads to salvation but that everything in this life leads to salvation. Similarly we believe that the decision is made upon a person’s death. If that person chooses to accept God’s mercy and forgiveness at the moment of his/her death, then that choice is eternal. Death is the final moment. Since after death, we cannot make any more decisions. Therefore everything in this life points to making that final decision before we meet God.

Conversion

The way we prepare for the final moment before meeting God is through conversion. Every day we are challenged by the events in life and the things we do to choose God or reject him, to do good or to sin. We make many different decisions that have varying consequences. Scripture teaches us about the importance of our decisions. When we are following God’s commands and doing what is right, we have no issues. The problem occurs when we don’t. The people of Israel are excellent examples of what happens when people don’t follow God’s commands. The prophets continued to call out their sins and shortcomings with disastrous results. Every time the people of Israel sinned by not following God’s commands, the prophets would call people to conversion. Conversion is the process of changing one’s mind and attitude to conform to God’s ways. This process can be a one-time event or continual. In most cases conversion is a continual process.

The process of reforming one's mind and actions to God is not an easy process. The vast majority of the issues we face are actions that are out of conformity with God's will and require us to change our habits or ways of doing things. Once we get past the major issues associated with following God's commands, the rest of full conversion is the process of coming to make God first in our lives. This process takes discipline and focus. The person who wants true conversion will conform their lives around God's way and work to make every moment and everything about God. The vast majority of people will constantly struggle between their own desires and God's desires for them. Hence the necessity of conversion.

The other side of conversion is the turning to God in our need. One of the greatest challenges to the desire to conform oneself to God is that we try to do everything ourselves. The idea that I can change everything and that I can conform my life to God is problematic. We need God's helps to conform our lives to him and we need his grace to help us in this process. Therefore the true life of conversion is a continual process of listening to God, hearing his ways, reforming our lives around his law, and asking for forgiveness when we fail.

The Saints are helpful for describing conversion and helping us to understand not only the challenges with conversion but also providing simple ways to grow in love of God and neighbor.

St. Maximilian Kolbe writes: holiness is simple. $W + w = \text{holiness}$. When our will (w) is united with God's will (W), then we are holy.

Fr. Scupli writes: to have absolute trust in God we must have absolute distrust of ourselves. The more we trust in our power to do things or do succeed in life, then the less we trust in God.

St. Therese of Lisieux writes: The secret to holiness is to do little things with great love.

St. Alphonsus Ligouri writes: "The perfection of the love of God consists in uniting our will with this most holy will, since the principal effect of love is so to unite the wills of those who love each other that they both seem to have but one and the same will."