

+ EASTER SUNDAY

April 16, 2017

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Philip Anderson, Abbot of Clear Creek Abbey
In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Brethren...Christ our Pasch is sacrificed. Therefore let us feast, not with the old leaven, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I Cor. 5.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,
My very dear sons,

Today is the greatest of days, the most venerable of feasts: it is a day when dark and sad things give way to what is entirely luminous and blessed. All hell was leagued against the Lord in His Most Sorrowful Passion; all of heaven rejoices to see Him rise from the dead as we celebrate the victory of God's infinite mercy over the powers of evil. It is such a victory that the darkness is nearly forgotten and will evaporate someday like so much smoke or an evil dream, when the end of the world ushers in a new Creation, a Creation in which God will be all in all. As the risen Jesus stands before His Mother and then before Saint Mary Madeleine on Easter morning an eternal springtime begins after a long spiritual winter—a winter so long that no one rightly remembers the number of the days.

To gaze out today upon this world redeemed by Christ, however, one might wonder about the nature of the victory: the old leaven of malice, ignorance, and corruption seems still very much with us. How can this be? Saint Paul continues to exhort us:

Brethren...Christ our Pasch is sacrificed. Therefore let us feast, not with the old leaven, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.¹

Clearly stated, the world is still a battle field, where Heaven and Hell contend for the souls of men, and this battle is extreme. What the Church is telling us today, however—and this teaching we must never forget—is that the spiritual principle of salvation has been planted like the staff of a victorious banner in the earth. The forces of the underworld are vanquished; the tide has definitively turned; the darkness is once and for all defeated. The old leaven, indeed, *has* been cast out. This is why we sang on procession awhile ago.

Salve, festa dies, toto venerabilis aevo, qua deus infernum vicit et astra tenet
Hail, thou festive, ever venerable day! whereon hell is conquered and Heaven is won by Christ.

The point is, however, that we must take our part in the battle before all is definitively settled. We have to cast out the old leaven from our souls, our families, and our whole society.

Now, according to some, in order to operate this throwing out of the old leaven, we as a nation today have to begin at zero in a certain manner: we have to make a strategic withdrawal from a society that is no longer Christian. Here is what a contemporary author says:

¹ I Cor. 5.

We Christians in the West are facing our...thousand-year flood—or if you believe Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, a fifteen-hundred-year flood; in 2012 the then-pontiff said that the spiritual crisis overtaking the West is the most serious since the fall of the Roman Empire near the end of the fifth century. The light of Christianity is flickering out all over the West. There are people alive today who may live to see the effective death of Christianity within our civilization...This may not be the end of the world, but it is the end of *a* world, and only the willfully blind would deny it.²

There is all too much truth to this harsh assessment. Part of the solution is surely a process of regrouping our strength in the solitude, away from the madness that characterizes much of contemporary society, in imitation of Our Blessed Father Saint Benedict, Patron Saint of Europe.

On the other hand, the Resurrection of Christ does not teach us to cave in upon ourselves, but to move forward with the courage of the martyrs, with the boldness of the saints. We understand that the contemplation of Mary also helps Martha to face the necessary tasks at hand. It was from contemplative monasteries that some of the greatest missionaries came, men such as Saint Boniface and Saint Willibrord. As contemplative monks, however, our way of responding to the Holy Father's invitation to "go forth" to evangelize the periphery of humanity starts at the center with silence and prayer. Pope Francis himself recognizes that mere activity will not help. He says,

Going out to others in order to reach the fringes of humanity does not mean rushing out aimlessly into the world. Often it is better simply to slow down, to put aside our eagerness in order to see and listen to others, to stop rushing from one thing to another ...³

Let us therefore first fill up our own cup. Then we will have something to give to others. Let us fill up our souls to the brim with the incomparable light and consolation of the Paschal mystery, of the Resurrection, in order then to face as we can the combat that remains for us in the world. Even before we reach, as we hope, those distant frontiers of Heaven where the paschal victory is fully celebrated, there is a feast at hand for us even now.

Therefore let us feast, exclaims Saint Paul, not with the old leaven, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Amen. Alleluia.

² Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option*, (New York: Random House, 2017), p. 8.

³ *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 46.