

Just a Solitary Life?

By Bishop Victor Galeone

Here is a man who was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in another village, where he worked in a carpenter shop until he was thirty. Then for three years he was an itinerant preacher.

He never owned a home. He never went to college. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He never had a family. He never set foot inside a big city. He never traveled two hundred miles from the place where he was born. He did none of the things that usually accompany greatness. He had no credentials but himself.

While still a young man, the tide of popular opinion turned against him. His friends ran away. One of them denied him. Another turned him over to his enemies. He went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. While he was dying, his executioners gambled for the only thing he owned on this earth - his coat. When he was dead, he was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend.

Nineteen centuries wide have come and gone, and today he is the central figure of the human race and the leader of the column of progress.

I am far within the mark when I say that all the armies that ever marched, and all the navies that ever sailed, and all the parliaments that ever sat, and all the kings that ever reigned - put together - have not affected the life of man upon this earth as powerfully as has that one solitary life.

Around Christmas, cards are sometimes exchanged that carry a version of this anonymous poem. I recall how moved I was many years ago when I read it for the first time.

And yet, there's a fundamental fact that's missing. Minus that fact, Jesus would have been a nonentity on the pages of history. Did you detect what's missing? There is no mention of his resurrection! That's the linchpin of the entire "solitary life."

The enemies of Christianity attempt to dismiss the resurrection as a hoax concocted by his disciples. They allege that the disciples moved his corpse to another location. Or perhaps they were hallucinating.

St. John Chrysostom, an early Church Father, refuted all these bogus arguments by reasoning: "How do you account for the fact that these men, who deserted and denied Christ during his lifetime, set out to win the whole world for him after his death? Did they perhaps say to themselves, 'He could not save himself while he was alive, but now that he is dead, he will extend a helping hand to us'?...It is evident, then, that if they had not seen him risen from the dead and had proof of his power, they would never have risked so much - including their own lives."

St. Paul asserts the same thing in 1 Corinthians 15: "If Christ has not risen from the dead, our preaching is useless, and so too is your faith...If our hope in Christ is for this life only, we are to be pitied more than everyone else."

To the Corinthians' objection that God cannot resurrect a body that has been devoured by lions or reduced to ashes, St. Paul states: (paraphrase) "How foolish! That seed you plant in the springtime is ugly, wrinkled - seemingly dead. Yet after the spring rains and under the summer sun, that same seed gives life to a marvelous bloom. So too, our body - planted weak and perishable - will rise powerful and glorious."

Yes, Jesus is alive! Ultimately it's due to his bodily resurrection that he is "the central figure of the human race (B.C. /A.D.)." But he does not wish to reign merely on the pages of a calendar. He wants to reign in our hearts.

I concluded my message in the January issue with a challenge. I asked you to begin each day with this short aspiration: "Lord Jesus, I love you. Come into my heart and stay with me all day long." I now renew that challenge. Until it becomes a habit, why not keep a short reminder next to your bed on retiring? You will soon notice a deeper relationship developing with the Lord as he becomes the center of your life.