

Resurrection-Alleluia

Easter Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez of St. Augustine
Resurrection Catholic Church, Jacksonville and to the
Albanian Catholic Community at San José Catholic Church, Jacksonville
March 31, 2013

Alleluia is the song of this sacred day in the entire Christendom. The whole cosmos exults in the glory of Jesus' victory over sin and death.

The first Christians used one word to express this profound contentment, Alleluia. In this year of faith, let us listen to our patron, St. Augustine explain to us the rich meaning of the word Alleluia:

“Our thoughts in this present life should turn on the praise of God (Alleluia), because it is in praising God that we shall rejoice forever in the life to come; and no one can be ready for the next life unless he trains himself for it now. So we praise God during our earthly life, and at the same time we make our petitions to him. Our praise is expressed with joy, our petitions with yearning. We have been promised something we do not yet possess, and because the promise was made by one who keeps his word, we trust him and are glad; but insofar as possession is delayed, we can only long and yearn for it. (Our condition is to be always on the way, in via). It is good for us to persevere in longing until we receive what was promised, and yearning is over; then praise alone will remain.”

For St. Augustine, “there are these two periods of time – the one that now is, beset with the trials and troubles of this life, and the other yet to come, a life of everlasting serenity and joy. We are given two liturgical seasons, one before Easter (40 days of Lent) and the other after. The season before Easter signifies the troubles in which we live here and now, while the time after Easter which we are celebrating at present signifies the happiness that will be ours in the future. What we commemorate before Easter is what we experience in this life; what we celebrate after Easter points to something we do not yet possess. This is why we keep the first season with fasting and prayer; but now the fast is over and we devote the present season to praise. Alleluia. Such is the meaning of the Alleluia we sing. (Sermo 252)

Today, with St. Augustine, I urge you to praise God especially on Sunday, the day of the Lord, with the entire family – here with your parish family. That is what we are all telling each other when we say Alleluia.

St. Augustine writes, “You say to your neighbor, “Praise the Lord!” and he says the same to you. We are all urging one another to praise the Lord, and all thereby doing what each of us urges the other to do. But see that your praise comes from your whole being; in other words, see that you praise God not with your lips and voices alone, but with your minds, your lives and all your actions...”

We are praising God now, assembled as we are here in church; but when we go our various ways again, it seems as if we cease to praise God. But provided we do not sin, we shall always be praising God. You cease to praise God only when you move away from justice and from what is pleasing to God. (Sermon 256)

Easter is a message of joy. Last night we sang” **exult, let the trumpet of salvation sound aloud our mighty King’s triumph! Be glad, let earth be glad, as glory floods her ablaze with light from her eternal King, let all corners of the earth be glad knowing an end to gloom and darkness. Rejoice”** ...this song was thus proclaimed, the traditional Easter Proclamation, known as the Exsultet.

The Good news is: our human life does not end at the tomb but with Passover, a passage from death into life thanks to Jesus’ passion, death and resurrection. During Easter, the paschal candle representing the Risen Lord stands majestically on the altar of our churches during the entire season to remind us: In Him, we have life in abundance...

That life has been given to us in baptism and it grows thanks to the Eucharist, as he said, I am the bread of life. “Whoever comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.” (Jo. 6, 35)

As your bishop, as your shepherd, I am aware that there is despair in many hearts. There are serious threats to human life and dignity, to the sacred order of marriage as the Creator intends. There is fear because of persistent violence at home and in our neighborhoods. Children and youth do not feel loved and elders wonder if they matter. There are many families who cannot make it financially. By his resurrection, Christ is our hope. We need his fragrance to permeate deep within us so that we make a definite choice: to love others, to care, to reach out preferentially to the needy, the sick, the immigrant, inspired with the energy of the New Adam, the new Man.

Come, live in the light of the Risen Lord! Happy Easter, Alleluia...all together: Alleluia.
Alleluia.