



ALL SAINTS CHURCH  
Pasadena, California

## Confirmation Homily

A sermon preached by The Right Reverend Barbara Harris,  
Retired Bishop Suffragan of Massachusetts,  
at the Confirmation service, Saturday, May 8, 2010

*O God, the light of the minds which know you, the joy of the hearts which love you, the strength of the wills which try to serve you, grant us to know you so as to love you, to love you so as to serve you, in whose service is perfect freedom. And since you have called all of us to your service, make us worthy of that calling and empower us for that service. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Good morning! It is a joy to be here with you, and to have the opportunity confirm, receive and reaffirm those who are candidates here today. I am grateful to your rector and other clergy for the kind invitation to join you today.

We began our Eucharist this morning with the Easter acclamation, “Alleluia! Christ is risen!” and the response, “The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!” That acclamation will continue to ring out in churches across the land throughout the remaining great 50 days of Easter. But I wonder for how many people it is real.

There are many people in this world who pride themselves on being practical, on being pragmatic, on being realistic – those who say, “I deal in facts and figures.” Well, facts and figures are fine, and they are very valuable to us, but they have little if anything to do with faith. It is easy for us all to understand Christ’s crucifixion; it is much more difficult to understand the resurrection. On Good Friday we are dealing with facts and figures; after that we are dealing with faith. We have all the facts:

- the Last Supper,
- the Garden of Gethsemane,
- Judas’ betrayal,
- Peter’s denial – three times,
- Jesus’ arrest, condemnation and judgment before Pilate,
- the walk to Calvary,
- seven words from the Cross,
- the agony, the death and burial.

But then we get to Easter, when we have nothing to go on but faith. How much can any preacher actually tell you about the Resurrection? How much can *you* actually tell anybody about it? Not much, in actual fact. We have a few figures:

- 1 stone rolled away;
- 1 empty tomb;
- 1 missing body;
- 2 young men in dazzling apparel, according to Luke – reduced to 1 angel, according to Mark;
- 3 women who go to the tomb;
- 11 frightened disciples who did *not* go, and who would not believe the women who *did* go.
- We are told that Peter then went running to the tomb, stooped down, looked in, saw the linen clothes by themselves, and went home wondering.

A few figures, but no real facts.

Nothing in the Gospels tells us who really rolled away the stone. Nothing tells us how the grave clothes got folded and neatly tucked into the corner of the tomb. Nothing tells us how Jesus got out; did he burst forth, or slip out quietly? What did he put on? Who gave him clothes to wear? We have no real facts on how the resurrection took place.

Most of us are well acquainted with death. Some of the young people here may not have experienced a death in the family yet, but many of us have lost loved ones, and we know that feeling of finality death brings. Whether recent or long ago, we live with the facts: funeral arrangements and their high cost; the burial service; the grief that follows. Can we live with the faith that God indeed has opened to our loved ones the gates of larger life?

We have the bare word – this bare promise: “I am the resurrection and the life.”<sup>1</sup> Some wish there could be more, such as someone coming back from the grave today to tell us, “It’s really true: Jesus lives – he really lives!” Or a group of witnesses who had a first-hand, close-up view of Christ alive and who could give their testimony. But such a demand for sign or proof is unbelief, not faith. If we count ourselves among the company of Jesus, the question we must ask is, do we really live by faith? The company of Jesus is not a company of those who have been satisfied with evidence; it is a company of faith that risks and dares to hold up their faith to all and say, “I believe. I believe he died; I believe he rose again; I believe he lives to make intercession for us. His word and his promise are secure.”

The fact is: he hung on the cross. The faith is: the company of Jesus hangs on the resurrection. Everything that makes a difference hangs on it. To the guilt we carry in our heart, the resurrection says our Lord has paid for it, removed it, and we no longer need to nurse it. To the chain of evil habits – envy, lust, greed, hatred, jealousy, selfishness and bigotry – the resurrection says, God the Son has broken them, removed them from our lives, and has cleansed us. To the hungry yearning burning inside of us, the empty void and the dark despair of grief when someone close to us has been taken from this earthly scene, the resurrection says, Christ has filled the void with the hope of being reunited. To the fear of aging, accident, disease and death, the resurrection says, our Lord has made it possible for us to live on with a purpose and a goal. To our uncertainty about tomorrow, the resurrection tells us, the Lord has wrapped tomorrow into his concern, and we are free to live today.

There are some who think the resurrection is a myth. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said he had a problem becoming a minister until he heard a lecture by a Dr. Kelsey, who said, “Look beyond the myth to find the eternal truths.” What the resurrection says to us is, someone has us by the hand from here on out to all eternity, and will never let us go. His name is Jesus. He gave himself for us, and all we need to know is that his word alone is sure. “In my father’s house are many mansions. If it were not so, would I have told you? I go to prepare a place for you ... that where I am, you may be also.”<sup>2</sup>

No facts, no figures, but faith. Faith alone and faith alive, the faith that says with Job of old, “I know that my redeemer lives, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth. And though worms destroy

this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself... My eyes shall behold as a friend, and not as a stranger.”<sup>3</sup>

My sisters and brothers, by faith keep hanging on the resurrection, because Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen!

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<sup>1</sup> John 11:25

<sup>2</sup> John 14:2—3

<sup>3</sup> Job 19:25—27