

# CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

Easter Sunday The Resurrection of the Lord | For Sunday, April 12, 2020

## Not Death But Eternal Life

*Written by Br. John Marmion Villa*

**Acts 10:34A, 37-43**

**Colossians 3:1-4**

**Or I Corinthians 5:6B-8**

**John 20:1-9**



The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has sure caused a rift in the normal flow of life for people all across the world. Many sectors of life have been curtailed by government officials as a way to “flatten the curve” of infection. I have been in contact with my own family, and I can sense a subtle fear of death among them as they are quarantined in their homes; perhaps they are not the only ones who have this fear. Christian monastic spirituality includes an aspect of preparing for death every day, something that has only started to grow on me recently. But how does this thought about death relate to Easter Sunday?

Mary Magdalen and the others went looking for a dead man. They had heard about the horrific execution of their beloved friend and teacher only a few days prior. It’s clear that Jesus was dead, and now isn’t dead. But how can that be? While I can’t explain how that miracle happened, I can hopefully try and explain the significance of that event in light of our current COVID-19 situation.

[St. Irenaeus of Lyons \(130AD-202AD\)](#) says that, “The business of the Christian is nothing else than to be ever preparing for death.” Ouch!! So difficult for so many reasons. Nevertheless, monastic spirituality has embraced this preparation in many concrete ways because of the understanding that death is not a finality, but rather a passageway into eternal life! It seems that we can lean on two examples to explain this: I can think of a

couple recent movies that use the theme of death-as-transition as a poignant moment in the protagonist's development ... [Maleficent 2 \(2019\)](#), and [X-Men 2: United \(2003\)](#). And nature itself gives us the example of the caterpillar-turned-butterfly to explain the same concept. In these examples, death is a necessary component in the total transformation, or rebirth, of something that was good into something that was better.

Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, I have been thinking a lot about death: what could it feel like to die, what kind of a death would I choose to embrace if I had the opportunity (clearly, I know I don't have a choice for when death would come), what would other people say about me in a eulogy, how would I like to be buried, etc. The saying "death by a thousand paper cuts" seems to describe the experience of monastic life in general where, through the day, in various ways, there are a number of opportunities to voluntarily choose a "death" to my preferences, my availability, my skills, or to my comfort. As inconvenient as these opportunities are, I realize ever more painfully that I'll choose comfort over sacrifice about 90% of the time. But then I am also reminded of the beauty of the vocation of marriage, wherein the requirements and demands of self-sacrificial love are ever-present. Although the circumstances are different, the opportunities for self-sacrificial love are still there in both vocations.

But, in all this thought about death, I discovered one more thing, a subtle distinction which makes all the difference for me. This "death" is not about the destruction or obliteration of my personhood. Rather, the contrary: it is precisely "walking through this valley of death without fear" that is the hidden and largely untrodden road towards the fullness of life, in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit that is our desire and our calling. This is the reason we celebrate Easter ... a celebration that we can experience throughout the entire year, not just on one Sunday in a church each year! Because we have been baptized into Christ, and if Christ rose from the dead, and if Christ is preparing a place for us in heaven, then why do we fear death when it is merely the passage towards our eternal home?

The monastic practice of remembering death is not a morbid fascination, nor is it merely a sentimental intellectual activity of your last day of life (like if you knew you were going to die tomorrow); rather, it is a robust perspective shift towards becoming as if "another Jesus." The Good Fridays of our lives always lead to an Easter Sunday. What do we think it will feel like when we finally walk out of our caves of fear, anxiety, pain, grudges,

unresolved tensions, regrets, etc. because Jesus has just rolled away the stone? We'll probably feel like a completely different person!

*Br. John Marmion Villa*

## PRAYER

Christ is Risen: the world below lies desolate.  
Christ is Risen: the spirits of evil are fallen.  
Christ is Risen: the angels of God are rejoicing.  
Christ is Risen: the tombs of the dead are empty.  
Christ is Risen indeed from the dead, the first of the sleepers.  
Glory and power are His forever and ever.  
-St. Hippolytus of Rome