

Easter Homily
"Risen"
April 11, 2004
by Father Michael Dibble

The Fathers wish you a Happy Easter, and I do, a "Happy Easter." Jesus is risen and He promised so will you and I rise. And that's a matter of life and death.... That's a matter of life and death. We all have that phrase.... "It's a matter of life and death." It is.

In 1957 we were studying in the seminary, the rational proofs (scriptural, archaeological, historical) that Jesus Christ physically rose, not just a nice memory, He physically rose from the dead and He said, "So will you and you and I, will rise from the dead." And I yawned. I remember it was Spring and it was warm, and we were studying "Apologetics." That is from a Greek word, which means "rational defense of the Faith," intellectual defense of your Catholic Faith. And I yawned and I thought, "Everybody believes Jesus rose from the dead. Let's get on with it. It's too hot." That was 1957.

In 1958 I had to leave the seminary because of big, big trouble at home, big trouble, big tragedy at home. And I had to leave the seminary. When I came back it was getting towards Easter in 1958 and, it was the worst Lent, the worst Holy Week, the worst Easter of my life to date. And I was sitting out there in 1958, home from the seminary after all this trouble, and the priest was talking about the Resurrection. I sat there and I wanted to pull him from the pulpit and pound on his pate and say, "Do you believe this? I mean isn't it just bunk? It's a matter of life and death." That's what I wanted to do. Now, I loved and respected this priest, but it was a little too bland. It was Spring and it was tulips and It's a matter of life and death.... suffering, misery, trouble, death, dying.... OK. So I pretty much lost my faith.

So, I decided I am going to study all the arguments against the Resurrection of Jesus. They began in the 18th century, a little bit in the Enlightenment. I read everything I could get. If I got French or German, I'd have people translate it, the arguments against the Resurrection of Jesus. And they all boiled down to three. (It was after months of study!)

The three theories we are going to call "Larry, Moe and Curley." And that sounds like I am mocking them, but you should hear the names they call each other. I mean these theories that Jesus never rose from the dead. And before I do I want to be quiet just for a second. I want you to think of one person you loved who died. I want you to see the face.....

OK. Larry's theory: The apostles stole the body. Carpenters don't crawl out of caves. There is no Resurrection. The apostles stole the body because they were embarrassed. I mean, Jesus did say

He would rise again, and He would raise us up on the last day. And He didn't rise and they were embarrassed. So, they got to the cave and they rolled away the stone and they punched out the Roman guards and they got Jesus' body and they buried it. Then they ran around saying, "He's risen" because they were embarrassed. But He didn't.

Well, over the years, people have said, "Where did they get the courage?" They are hiding out after Jesus died. Three days later, they are running around Jerusalem, "He's risen!" And then through Asia Minor and then through the Roman Empire, "He is risen!" Not just the apostles, but more than five hundred people, according to the story, "He rose from the dead!" Where did they get the guts? Where did they get the courage? Not one of them "cracked".... not one of them. They were exiled, tortured, put to terrible deaths, not just the apostles, more than five hundred. Nobody cracked. Nobody said, "Hold it, folks. I'm just kidding!"

And there was a man named "Josephus" (Try to remember the name when you hear people say, "Oh, it's all made up.") who lived in Rome. He was a Jew. He never met Jesus but he didn't like Him because he got letters back and forth from Jesus' enemies. Josephus' records and documents, we've got them. And Josephus writes in Rome, (He was a history professor, brilliant.) "There is this carpenter going around and some of my friends don't like him." And then Josephus in letters and diaries says, "And then they killed him." Then Josephus scratches his head, over in Rome, because some of the very Pharisees who wanted Jesus put to death now have joined His group. They say, "He has risen." They have seen Him!

I want you to think of somebody you have loved who has died. I am going to say a name for me... "Eleanor Kelly Dibble." That was my mother. She died when I was six. Jesus Christ said He will raise her up on the last day, and the one you thought of!

Next theory came along a few decades later. This is Moe. Moe said, "Oh, that's ridiculous. The apostles didn't steal the body. That's really dumb. The Pharisees stole the body. Jesus' enemies, they stole the body because they were afraid that, because Jesus really was popular among the majority of the Jews, that the apostles would point and say, 'That's where our beloved Jesus was murdered by those nasty Pharisees, and we are going to turn it into a shrine.... five dollars a ticket and this is the shrine of Jesus and we are going to make Jesus very popular because they killed him.' So, we Pharisees, we will steal the body and then we will say, 'You apostles, you can't make it into a shrine. We took the body away and we put it where no one will never find it. Ha!'".... Now you know I am doing this, a cartoon version, because of time.

If the Sadducees and the Pharisees stole Jesus' body, then how come, when the apostles went out on Easter Sunday and year after year and decade after decade, Jerusalem, Asia Minor, the Roman Empire, went around saying, "He rose. We touched Him. We saw Him," why didn't the Pharisees say, "Hold it, you jokers. We took the body. The empty tomb. We know where we buried him. Knock it off. He's risen?" But not one voice was raised from any of Jesus' enemies to say that. In fact, Josephus, way over in Rome, writes, annoyed, in his diary, "Some of the

Pharisees who had Jesus put to death have now joined His group and have been converted to Christ.” And St. Paul writes, in 55 A.D., “There are more than five hundred people who saw Jesus, not just the apostles, some of them are still alive. If you don’t believe what we are saying, talk to them. They are living witnesses.” 55 A.D. By the way, nobody disputes the historicity or validity of any of these historical documents. Nobody! There has been no life more carefully examined than Jesus Christ’s.

I want you to think of somebody who has died. My name is “Bernard Dibble,” my father. Jesus rose. He said I will see my father in the face, a risen body, but I will see him. That is Christ’s promise.

And the last, after Larry and Moe, is Curley. And Curley came out with a theory, about in the sixties. Maybe some of you read the book. It didn’t last long, but Curley’s theory was “Jesus never died. He swooned. He passed out. He woke up in the tomb, Easter Sunday morning. He stripped off the cloths, moved the boulder, belted all the Roman guards, made His way several miles to where the apostles were hiding out, walked in, stark naked, said, “Hi” and then He died. The apostles said, “Now what do we do?” and they buried Him. I’m rushing it but that was the theory: He didn’t die, just fainted, and they got rid of Him later.

When Freud was dying in London, the Father of Psychology, he heard Easter bells ringing, Sigmund Freud, and he was thinking about all the arguments about the Resurrection. He turned to his wife and said, “It can’t be mass hypnotism. It can’t be they wanted it so badly, they imagined Him alive. It can’t be hysteria. There is no psychological explanation for how those men changed the face of the earth. And then Freud, we are told, said, “Maybe.... maybe.... “ Freud!

I want you to think of somebody who died, someone you loved. And I am thinking of a man named Kenneth Stone. I shall see him again. Jesus Christ promised. I will see him in the face as the apostles saw Jesus in the face.

This is the end now. Several years ago, I was at Stanford and there was a Stanford professor who had examined all the stuff and become a very believing Roman Catholic. I was in his classroom and I said, “If all the evidence proves that Christ rose and that he promised that you and I will rise (He said, “I will raise you up on the last day.”) I’m going to see my mother again. You are going to see somebody you loved again, a baby maybe who died. You are going to see them again.” I said to this Stanford professor, who was a new convert, with a giant IQ, “Why don’t people believe in the Resurrection? All the evidence says Jesus rose and He says we will too.” And this Stanford professor leaned on the lectern and he said, “Maybe it just seems too good to be true to some people. Just seems too good to be true.”

Now, I can give you the names of lots of scholarly books written by people, that Christ rose from the dead. I can give you the names of three Nobel Prize Winners in Science who converted

to the faith because Christ rose from the dead physically and so will we. It's not just tulips and gorgeous music and decor. It's a matter of life and death..... and life again.