

He IS Resurrected
Homily of March 27, 2005
by Father Michael Dibble

La-La-La-La. La-La-La-La. I haven't gone crazy! Up until the year 1957, when the word "Easter" was used, the first thing I thought of was that song which was part of the Easter stage show at Radio City Music Hall in New York City. And I had been to the Easter Show many years, stood on line, got in and Frankly, it was the first thing I thought of, The Rockettes, dressed in long white robes with big white hats that looked like a "V" upside down and carrying long, long lilies. Twenty-four of them came out on this huge New York City stage, singing, "La-La-La-La." And behind them at the Easter Show there was a big window and a shaft of light came through. Now, the curtain came down and the Rockettes came out, now dressed as jelly beans, and they danced, kicking those long, lovely stems high in the air. I admit it. Up to 1957, that was the first thing I thought of.

Now, I was a good little Catholic boy, kid, and I believed that Jesus rose from the dead, but I remember when I was studying in the seminary, when we got to the Scripture about "Jesus rose from the dead," I remember looking at my nails up til 1958. In 1957, I was studying my nails, wondering about handball that afternoon... La-La-La-La. in 1958, this month, March 1958, there was terrible trouble at home, real crises, which I will spare you all the Dickensian details. Terrible trouble at home, and I had to leave the seminary for awhile.

I went home and then I was confronted with Holy Week and Easter. And I didn't look at my nails anymore because everything, everything, suffering, death, misery, jail, dope addiction, drunkenness, infidelity, terrible things. If Christ rose from the dead on Easter and he said, "So will we," not just the memory of us, we will absolutely meet each other. Risen bodies, yes. But we'll live forever. It matters! It matters! Suddenly, in 1958, that mattered because if he rose from the dead and we are going to Even terrible pain, it's OK.

So, I lived right next to Columbia University. (I promise to get off the pronoun "I" in a minute.) But I went to Columbia all Easter vacation. I got every book I could get since the eighteenth century, written, saying the Resurrection never happened. If it was in French or German, I got kids at Columbia to translate it for me. Hours every day! "He didn't rise from the dead..... He didn't rise from the dead..... He didn't rise from the dead....." (I'm going to have to apologize fast to these who have been here before because I give the same talk every Easter. And if you were here before, you can go to a contemplative coma until I am finished.) But, it's so important. Otherwise, to so many, it is still pretty much "La-La-La-La" and lilies and jelly beans and "Isn't it lovely? That lovely myth about Spring and Jesus rising.... It's all so lovely. Ho-hum."

In 1958 it wasn't ho-hum, and I got every book I could get that said he didn't rise. He didn't rise. He didn't rise. Now, I am not going to disprize these theories, but I have to go through them quickly in a kind of cartoon way because it is Easter and you want to, of course, leave and have something to eat. But I am not saying anything false. I am just condensing it fast. OK.

When I finished reading all these books, I knew that the Resurrection of Christ was a matter of life and death, not only for my family, for everybody. Life and death, and life again. Anyhow, there are only three theories. Number 1, the eighteenth century (Up to then everyone believed.) In the eighteenth century books were written that said "He didn't rise from the dead. You don't get carpenters crawling out of coffins. That is a lovely myth. What happened was that the apostles stole the body. The apostles stole Jesus' body because there is no Resurrection. The apostles stole the body because they were scared that they would be very embarrassed. After all, their leader said he would rise from the dead. And of course, he wasn't rising from the dead. So, the apostles snuck up that night before. They slugged out the Roman cohort (about twelve Roman soldiers). They belted them down. They moved the stone. They carried Our Lord's corpse. They put it in a boat. (I am rushing this, but I am not making it up.) And they rowed out to the Sea of Galilee and dumped the body. Then on Easter, they went around and said, "He's risen. He's risen. Ha-Ha!"

Well, in the nineteenth century, more sceptical scholars (And I say "sceptical scholars" with respect.) came along and said, "That last theory is bunk. It's ridiculous. The apostles stole the body? If the apostles stole the body, how did they become such enormously different men on Easter Sunday, and go out to exile, torture and death? And none of them cracked. None of them said, 'Only kidding.... We were embarrassed.'" It's also recorded by a Jewish historian, and for anybody in here who is in college or has lost his or her faith.... There was a Jewish man named "Josephus," no fan of Christ. He lived in Rome at the same time. And we have Josephus'es letters. And he talks about how this carpenter was giving the Pharisees trouble. And then later, "Some of my Pharisee friends have actually joined this cult of Jesus Christ. They say they saw him alive." And Josephus is very irritated. We have Josephus'es records. "Not one of them broke." Even Freud said that in London. Freud: "How come none of them collapsed and broke and said 'We are only kidding?'" Exile, torture and death.... Those aren't big perks for saying "He is risen" ... changing the Mediterranean and eventually the world.

Then as the nineteenth century moved along, now, what happened was "The Pharisees stole the body. That's why there was an empty tomb. The Pharisees were embarrassed because they knew that Jesus was loved by a lot of the poorer people. And the apostles will go around saying, "Oh! You killed our sweet Jesus who talked about brotherly love and forgiveness. You killed our sweet Jesus, and we are going to turn that tomb (which still has his corpse in it) into a kind of shrine, a couple of shepherds per candle. We will turn it into a shrine and embarrass the Pharisees because they killed such a nice sweet man." And what did the Pharisees do with the body? Well, they put it into a boat and they dumped it in the Sea of Galilee.

But how do you account for Josephus, over in Rome at the same time, saying "Many of these Pharisees who planned to kill Jesus and killed him say now they have seen him. They have joined his

faith. They have touched him and talked to him. And how did all those apostles get to be such different people? And why, when the apostles ran around saying "He's risen" on Easter.... Why didn't the Pharisees say, "Cool it! Hold on! We stole the body. We can show you where we dumped it in the Sea of Galilee." Nobody said peep. They were all very quiet.

And now we are up to the third and last theory, which happened in the twentieth century, when I was teaching in college. A kid ran in and said, "Have you read this book?" which I did, twice. You see, the Pharisees stole the body.... Nobody bought that anymore. The apostles stole the body. Nobody bought that anymore. How do you still explain the empty tomb? Well, Jesus never really died. He fainted. Now I know it is easy for me to be kind of mocking these things, but I am just rushing it. I am not telling what they don't say. He fainted. He swooned. He was exhausted. And they buried him. And on Easter Sunday, he woke up, took off the cloths, rolled the stone away single-handed, belted out the Roman cohort and staggered into Jerusalem, naked, climbed the stairs to where the apostles were hiding out, walked in and said, "Hi folks!" Then he died. And they put his body in a boat and they dumped it into the now rapidly crowded Sea of Galilee.

Now, I think your laughter is both reverent and empathic. Of course a person who is thinking, whose mind is past the IQ of a pancake, and who doesn't believe in Christ or God or Risen, is going to come up with some kind of an explanation, because where did his body go? And how did all these guys get so transformed from being cowards and hide-outs to going out and changing the world, including Pharisees? "Five hundred people," we read in Josephus, "Five hundred people, up to 55 A.D., were still alive, saying, 'We saw him. We touched him. It's not imagination. It's not hallucination. We haven't been smoking grass.'"

It is so terribly important. If he didn't rise from the dead, this whole mythology and pretty statues and bald-headed babbling priests is silly. Let's go out to breakfast. If he rose from the dead, even then, some of us might yawn and check our fingernails, as I did. But he said, "You will, and you and the young men, and I... We will rise. We will see them in the flesh." That's essential to Christian faith. Otherwise the whole thing is a lot of costumes and....

Because I was a high school and college teacher for thirty years, I know, on Easter Sunday, a lot of young men and women come to Mass, harpooned there by relatives, "You're coming to Mass!" And because they love their Mom or Pop or Aunt Millie, they come and... There is a little book. It is not a book of devotions, you know, to St. Euthenasia of the Green Thumb or anything like that. This is a scholarly book that has won many many a brainy convert. It is called "More Than a Carpenter." I know you're not going to remember, but some day.... You know that priest who was follicle-ly challenged at Christ the King, and who kept waving a book.... what was the name of the book? You'll find out. You can call. "More Than a Carpenter." It has made so many young men and women of keen thinking and very healthy scepticism say, "Oh, how do I deal with this? He did rise from the dead." There is no other explanation to the most sophisticated cynic. There isn't. And he promised, "So will you." So will I. We will. We will see each other in the face. And the first thing you will say is, "You were awful long-winded that Sunday...."

I was at Stanford several years back and I spoke to a big shot intellectual Stanford professor who is a convert to the Faith. He read his way, studied his way, to the Faith, the Risen Christ. I said to him, after we went all through these theories again, I said "Why can't some people accept the fact that Christ rose and he promised 'So will we'?" And this professor leaned over the lectern, very gently, and he said, "Because I think people think it's too good to be true. I think they just think it's too good to be true, especially if they have suffered a lot or they have been over-rationalistic minds. It's just too good to be true."

Well, it's a lot better than "La-La-La-La." It's a matter of life and death, life and death, and life again, forever.