

**“You Bet Your Life”**  
Homily of April 24, 2006  
by Fr. Michael Dibble

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I’m going to ask you to be very patient with me this morning because I am going to be talking very fast, faster than usual, because there is so much I want to say and someone is going to give me a signal when my time is up.

This is the second most important passage in the entire Bible, in my opinion, this particular priest’s opinion. What I just read is the second most important thing in the whole Bible. The first is the Resurrection account. And because I think it’s so important, it’s the fifth Easter I have been doing it with you. And if you recognize the material, as I often suggest, take a spiritual snooze. “I heard it last Easter.” There’s nothing wrong with that, a little contemplative coma. But I need to hear it over and over again. And maybe there is just one person at this Mass, if there be just one, if you lost someone you loved this year, someone died, and you loved that person, that person’s gone, this is for you and for me. Or, if you’re scared of dying, there is nothing shameful about that, scared of dying. That ‘s for you.

Now, there used to be an old show on TV, starring Groucho Marx, who was a comic of the old days. And the name of the show was “You Bet Your Life!” That’s the theme. That’s our theme, maybe the three of us. You bet your life.... on this gospel. You see, it isn’t just “That nice man rose, ho-hum, what’s on Channel 7?” He said that, so would you, and you and I and people we’d loved who have died, will rise. Not a metaphor. Not a memory. Will rise and be tangible as Jesus is in this gospel. Tangible! Physical, recognize each other. It’s his promise. If he rose, he will keep the promise.

If he didn’t, well I’m going back to hard liquor! And if he didn’t I think some of us would be Deists. The Deists were a group that came along with the Enlightenment.... Voltaire and that group. Very intelligent. But the Deists said “Anybody with brains knows there is a creative energy, a creative force, that made all of this universe but he is like a watchmaker. A watchmaker makes a watch with care and precision. Then he puts it on the shelf and the watchmaker goes out to lunch.” The Deists say, (And if I did not believe this stuff personally I would be a Deist!) that God’s been out to lunch since. And that little watch (ourselves, the Planet) is winding down. So are we. The Deist is out to lunch. But if Christ lived and died and rose and will keep his promise, and the way he talks about the Father it’s a loving, intimate friendship.... OK That’s the other, one or the other. But only if he rose. Otherwise, a nice Jewish guy died. I had a priest friend of mine in 1964, who said, “It wouldn’t bother me if they found Jesus’ bones in some crypt.” It would bother me, because it was another nice Jewish man who

died. “Well, he’s a good philosopher.” Fine. I’ll go to Marcus Aurelius or Snoopy! He’s got to be more than that.

OK. We’re up to number four.... out of ten. There was a man who lived at the same time as Our Lord lived. His name was Josephus. He never met Christ, but he lived in Rome. He was a brilliant, intellectual Jew. He was so prominent that he was the instructor of Patrician kids, the families of big nobles in Rome. A highly brilliant Jew. The guy who lives next door to me in Martinez has a collection of Josephus’ works in the original language. Josephus talks about Christ. So it wasn’t Matthew, Mark, Luke and John made the whole thing up. He refers to Christ, very briefly, illusively. At one point Josephus says ( I am putting it colloquially.) “There’s this character, Jesus, some kind of carpenter, and he is giving my friends, the Pharisees, a hard time. He’s a real clown. And some of the Pharisees, pals of mine, back in Jerusalem, are finding him irritating.” Later on, Josephus says, with some scratching of his head, “Some of the Pharisees who plotted to have this carpenter killed have now joined his group because they say that they themselves have seen this man risen and they have joined the group.” Josephus is a hostile, highly-intelligent witness. So, it’s not just the gospels.

OK. We are up to number five. There has been more research done on this Jewish carpenter and that empty tomb on Easter Sunday than any of the other historical characters who ever lived. Of course, because he made bigger noise! And bigger absurd promises (“I am risen. So will you.” “I am tangible” in today’s gospel. “So will you be” to people you have loved who have died.)

Where did the body go? That has been occupying many people for the past couple of hundred years, especially a group called the Enlightenment. Many brilliant minds in the Enlightenment, Voltaire, for example, the Deists. And since then there have been three theories. And I am going to rush through them. We spend six months studying this stuff in the seminary, six intensive months. I remember we got to the Resurrection and it was April and it was hot. It was an afternoon class. There were sixty of us packed into this lecture hall. It was hot and I saw a couple of guys yawning. Why not? It was hot and they were tired. But something had happened in my life in 1958 and I said, “Wait a minute! How can you yawn?” I said it quietly and discreetly. They were very big. I mean how can you guys yawn?? If this isn’t true, if Christ didn’t physically rise (not a metaphor or lovely symbol), physically rose and said so would you and I and people who died, then the rest of this stuff is brain-washed banana oil! Rubrics in Church, music..... And even the sacraments, it’s all brain-washed baloney! BUT if he rose from the dead and he’s going to keep the promises he made, the other stuff fits in. But don’t yawn!! Hold onto this stuff! The research has been done by first-rate minds. Where did the body go?

OK. We are up to number six. Here are the three theories from the past couple hundred years. Theory number one was the apostles stole the body. The apostles! They were embarrassed. This jerk said he would rise again on the third day and there he is still in the crypt. So what we guys got to do is sneak in Holy Saturday Night, grab the body, put it in a canoe, row out to the Lake of Galilee and dump the body. It’s just too embarrassing. We’ll say “See the empty tomb. He rose. He rose.” It’s just too embarrassing that he’s died. Well, that theory was thrown out

because historians (not Catholics.... agnostics, atheists) say “But how did these eleven guys change the face of the Mediterranean basin? Three days later, they go out and they proclaim this? What’s their big reward? Exile. Persecution. Torture. And death, all of them wiped out.” Plus, according to historians, there were about five hundred people who said they saw Christ before he went back. And none of them cracked. They all stayed that way. They went to awful deaths. Nobody cracked. Nobody said, “Don’t do it. I made it up!” And where did they get this courage? How did they.....?

Number seven. No, the apostles didn’t steal the body. That’s psychologically and historically dumb. The Pharisees stole it. The reason the Pharisees stole the body is they were scared that the apostles would come along and say, “See that? That’s the tomb where those wicked Pharisees did it to our lovable Jesus.” (I’m talking like a little kid. I know, but just because of time.) So why don’t you come and kneel at this tomb where Jesus lies (sob! sob! sob!) and maybe give us a couple of shekels so we can keep the shrine going and, in the meantime, you’d better get really mad at those Pharisees and make their lives hell, what they did to our lovely Jesus.” Well, if that’s it, why, on Easter Sunday, if the Pharisees dump the body into the Lake of Galilee, why didn’t the Pharisees say to the apostles, “Will you guys cool it? You apostles are running around, ‘He is risen.’ We know where he is. He is in the middle of the Lake of Galilee, and we have plenty of witnesses to attest to that. We stole the body.” But, as historians have pointed out, not a peep. Not a peep out of the Pharisees. And Josephus, back there in Rome, is saying “Some of those Pharisee pals of mine, pen-pals, are now joining this group because they say they saw him rise. And the third theory, and some of you may be old enough to remember this. This was a big hit in the sixties, like the DaVinci Code, St. Judas..... Some of my college kids would run in: “Have you read this book?” The Passover Plot! It was a big hit for about two years. Jesus didn’t die. He fainted. He swooned. Then on Holy Saturday night, he woke up in the tomb, took off the clothing, moved the boulder, punched out the Roman guards, made his way a couple of miles, naked, into Jerusalem, climbed the stairs, knocked on the door. They let him in. He said, “Hi, apostles.” Then he died. They put him in the boat and they rowed and dumped him in the Lake of Galilee, which, at this point, is getting very crowded.

Now it is easy for me to kind of poke fun at these scholars. I don’t doubt each of them approached the topic with some seriousness. When I was at the bookstore recently (Is he going to wave another book at us? ...Yes.) I saw it right next to the DaVinci Code. The DaVinci Code is entertaining fiction, but this is fact, “The Case for Christ.” It’s got research by Harvard, Princeton Universities, Yale. I mean real scholarly research. Where did the body go? As I told you a while back, this guy at Stanford who became a convert by studying evidence for the Resurrection, and if he rose and the things he said we could listen to (“You will rise.”) The guy at Stanford said to me, “People still find it hard because it seems too good to be true.” ...”The Case for Christ,” it’s the best thing I have ever read on evidence for the physical resurrection. Now, Our Lord says, “So will you. So will I.” Oh, incidentally, doctors who have done research on crucified people say that if Jesus suffered half of the stuff that is recorded, he did not revive. He was dead, dead, dead.

Freud, when he was dying in London in 1939, Freud, the Father of Psychoanalysis, went through all the theories: mass hypnotism, self-delusion, hallucination. Even Freud said, “No, no, no.” And Freud was dying in London, he said to his wife, “Where did the body go?” And Freud was an atheist, had a first rate mind. “Where did the body go?” According to today’s gospel, he rose. Now, if there is somebody here, just one person, at Mass who lost this year somebody you loved, and if it was a long sickness, or a painful death, there has got to be, because you are human, a certain relief that he or she is dead. And then, because you have a highly sensitive conscience, guilt about the fact that you feel relief and now you are suffering again all over. If Christ will keep his promise, if he rose and so will we, not metaphors, not symbols, tangible as he was to Thomas, tangible, you will see her or him again. I’ll see my mom. You’ll see a kid who maybe died too young again in the risen body. And on that, in the words of Groucho Marx, (you and I) you bet your life!!