

Daily Resurrection

A Reflection by Fr. Ronald Rolheiser, OMI

Gilbert K. Chesterton once wrote a poem he entitled, Second Childhood. It speaks of the resurrection:

When all my days are ending
And I have no song to sing,
I think that I shall not be too old
To stare at everything;
As I stared once at a nursery door
Or a tall tree and a swing. ...

Men grow too old for love; my love,
Men grow too old for lies;
But I shall not grow too old to see
Enormous night arise,
A cloud that is larger than the world
And a monster made of eyes. ...

Men grow too old to woo, my love,
Men grow too old to wed;
But I shall not grow too old to see
Hung crazily overhead
Incredible rafters when I wake
And I find that I am not dead. ...

Strange crawling carpets of the grass,
Wide windows of the sky;
So in this perilous grace of God
With all my sins go I;
And things grow new though I grow
old,
Though I grow old and die.



What the resurrection of Jesus promises is that things can always be new again. It's never too late to start over. Nothing is irrevocable. No betrayal is final. No sin is unforgivable. Every form of death can be overcome. There isn't any loss that can't be redeemed. Every day is virgin. There is really no such thing as old age.

In the resurrection we are assured that there are no doors that are eternally closed, every time we close a door, or one is closed on us, God opens another for us. The resurrection assures us that God never gives up on us, even if we give up on ourselves, that God writes straight with the crooked lines of our lives, that we can forever re-virginize, regain lost innocence, become post-sophisticated, and move beyond

bitterness. In a scheme of things where Jesus breathes out forgiveness on those who betray him and God raises dead bodies from the dead, we can begin to believe that in the end all will be well and every manner of being will be well and everything, including our own lives, will eventually end sunny side up.

However, the challenge of living this out is not just that of believing that Jesus rose physically from the grave, but also, and perhaps even more importantly, to believe that – no matter our age, mistakes, betrayals, wounds, and deaths – we can begin each day afresh, virgin, innocent again, a child, a moral infant, stunned at the newness of it all. No matter what we've done, our future is forever pregnant with wonderful new possibility. Resurrection is not just a question of one day, after death, rising from the dead, but it is also about daily rising from the many mini graves within which we so often find ourselves.

How does belief in the resurrection help us rise from these mini graves? By keeping us open to surprise, newness, and freshness in our lives. Not an easy thing to do. We are human and we cannot avoid falling – into depression, bitterness, sin, betrayal, cynicism, and the tiredness that comes with age. Like Jesus, we too will have our crucifixions. More than one grave awaits us. Yet our faith in the resurrection invites us precisely to live beyond these. As John Shea once so aptly put it: What the resurrection teaches us is not how to live – but how to live again, and again, and again!

G.K. Chesterton, whom we quoted earlier, was also fond of saying: “Learn to look at things familiar until they look unfamiliar again. Familiarity is the greatest of all illusions.” In essence, that captures one of the real challenges of believing in the resurrection. If the resurrection is to have power in our lives, we must give up the illusion of familiarity, particularly as this pertains to all that's nearest to us because the most common cancer that eats away at our marriages, families, communities, friendships, and simply at the joy we might have in living, is precisely the cancer of familiarity. We think we know, we think we understand, we think we have things figured-out, and we end up psyching-out life and each other, leaving them no room for newness, for surprise, for the unfamiliar, for the resurrection.

Familiarity breeds contempt. Nothing robs us of joy more than that and nothing destroys our marriages, families, communities, and friendships more than a contemptuousness that is born of familiarity. The resurrection tells us that familiarity is an illusion, the greatest of all illusions. It invites us to look at things familiar until they look unfamiliar again because, in the end, a startling, delightful surprise is hidden in all that is familiar.