

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Had Christ not been raised, our preaching and your faith would be in vain, you would still be in your sins, but in fact, **Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!**

Since you have received forgiveness of your sins, through the Crucified and Risen Christ, the Apostle Paul calls Christians to be Easter people. He is calling us to Easter living. Paul is calling us to celebrate the Easter festival not in celebrating our sins, but as forgiven people in Christ.

Through the Holy Spirit, Paul writes, ***“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed”*** (1 Corinthians 5b-7).

The Apostle Paul fathered the church in Corinth, but this church caused the most headaches for its father. In so many ways, Corinth most closely resembles the western Christian church today.

For the most part, the western Church has deluded itself into believing that the caring thing is to be infinitely nonjudgmental and inclusive. But this is simply a demonic lie. This lie causes the church to allow cancerous abuses to continue unchecked to the point when that cancer takes over the whole body and the body dies.

So, what was going on in Corinth? Well, they should have all been ashamed of an incestuous relationship in their midst, but instead, for the most part, the church was fine with it as Corinth took pride in their openness and tolerance. They were complacent about sin. In fact, they encouraged all sorts of sexual immorality, saying, “Love is love.” They were boasting that the forgiveness won for them by Christ Crucified gives them outright permission to do every sin imaginable.

To all this pride in sin, St. Paul admonishes them. Paul says to them, “You have the Gospel and you have become Christians, but you are also to live according to the Gospel by fleeing and avoiding everything that is not in conformity with faith and Christian conduct.”

In a culture where bread was the staple food, the Holy Spirit inspires St. Paul to offer this wayward church an object lesson: ***“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened”*** (1 Corinthians 5:6b-7a).

You see, everyone knew how a little leaven would permeate a batch of flour, causing it to swell and rise, ready for baking. At the same time, this powerful ingredient, so useful for baking, also came to symbolize evils which had the power to spread.

One of those evils was false doctrine. As it is with leaven, false doctrine works the same way. It may appear like a good thing at first, but quickly, false doctrine takes over and Christianity is lost. As it was for Corinth, they wanted to preach the Gospel of Christ, but mixed with the fallen world. This is the case with the mainline western church today. As the mainline denominations reasoned away Biblical authority, the sinful flesh and the fallen world took over. Truth was lost.

You see, when one begins to give way to the flesh and to abuse freedom, even under the name of the Gospel, then that yeast is mixed into the right Christian conduct and quickly corrupts faith and conscience, it sweeps on until Christ and the Gospel are completely forgotten.

If it wasn't for Paul admonishing the church in Corinth, Christianity would have been lost there. With love, Paul admonished and urged them to seep out this yeast, since the church has already begun to practice all kinds of sinful acts.

With only one drop of poison, sweet wine and medicine are made harmful. Likewise, if only a drop of impurity is added to God's Word, it is corrupted and it is good for nothing. The worst thing about leaven is that it spreads and adheres so strongly that it cannot be gotten out. It's like cancer. It needs to be completely removed.

So, Christianity cannot tolerate false teachings. If it is mixed with human additions, then it will be obscured and damaged, and souls are led astray. To this, Christ says in Matthew 9:16, ***“No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made.”***

As Easter Christians, faith cannot coexist with living according to the depravity of the flesh in sins and vice against the conscience. In one chapter later, Paul writes, ***“Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, no adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God”*** (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

So, as Easter Christians, we must sweep away the old yeast of sin – *whatever sins they may be* – and we are to teach those in our midst to sweep away the old yeast, those who have given into the devil’s lies. We must teach them and tell them that their old yeast must be swept away and that they are not Christians if they consistently give in to their sinful flesh and purposely remain and persist in sins against conscience. For it is so much worse when sin is done under the Name and cover of the Gospel, for in that way the Name of Christ is slandered and despised.

For, if we are Easter Christians, we are ***“a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come”*** (2 Corinthians 5:17). We must sweep away the old yeast. Being a new dough and letting the old yeast remain is not fitting for celebrating Easter, for if it is not swept out, the new dough will be completely leavened and corrupted, so the previous sinful life would gain the upper hand and overthrow faith.

Through the Crucified and Risen Christ, we have become unleavened. Christ says to us, ***“You are clean because of My Word”*** (John 15:3), but Christ also says, ***“Every branch that does not produce fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit”*** (John 15:2).

It is Christ alone who makes us clean. He makes us clean through the Word and faith. But this isn’t immediate. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ works in us daily to cleanse us until we become purer and purer. He makes us purer through the office of the Holy Ministry with admonition, rebuking, improvement, and strengthening, just as Christ did through St. Paul at Corinth.

So, how do we live as Easter people? Well, through the work of the Holy Spirit, He leads us to appropriate and transpose our lives and behavior. Just as was done in Corinth, He does for us! The purity of the Corinthian church was at risk, but the triune God didn’t leave them in their sins. It was the work of God who led them to repentance, faith in the forgiveness of sins, and the new life in Christ. And it is the work of God who leads us to repentance, faith in the forgiveness of sins, and the new life in Christ, too!

We must trust in ***“Jesus Christ and Him crucified”*** (1 Corinthians 2:2) as He has made Corinth and us a community of repentant sinners who live under the cross of Christ. We have ***“washed our robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb”*** (Revelation 7:14). Fellow purified and redeemed, it is un-Christian to tolerate a fellow brother or sister in Christ who shows open contempt for the Gospel by their unwillingness to repent and look for forgiveness to Christ crucified for we are only made holy, redeemed, and clean through the crucified Christ.

So just as Paul exhorted Corinth, he also exhorts us to properly celebrate the fulfilled Passover inaugurated by Christ’s crucifixion and His bodily resurrection! For Christians, Easter is not just today. It’s not just Sundays and Mondays with the mini-Easters of the Divine Service. No! For us, Easter is every day! We are forgiven in Christ, so let us live forgiven in Christ!

As we celebrate the new life in Christ, we should no longer be infected by ***“the old leaven”*** (1 Corinthians 5:7-8) of sin and arrogance. Nor should this new life feature ***“malice and wickedness”*** (1 Corinthians 5:8). Rather, we live the new life in Christ with fresh, unleavened bread ***“of sincerity and truth”*** (1 Corinthians 5:8).

In just mere minutes, Christ will give us forgiveness of sins through the Easter Lamb of unleavened bread in the Sacrament of the Altar. We add nothing, except that we receive Christ’s body and it eat it through faith, which Christ bestows to us and gives to us through that eating and drinking.

May we always celebrate the Easter festival in sincerity and truth for ***Christ is risen!***
He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +