EASTER MORN MESSAGES

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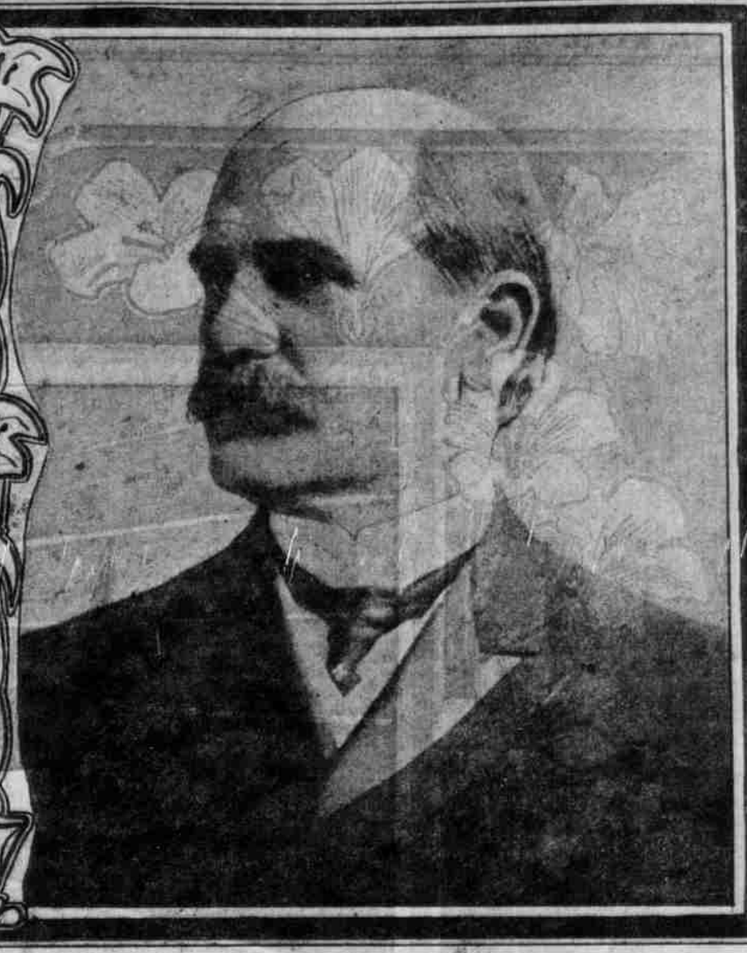

REV. LUTHER D. DYOTT D.D.

Easter Greetings

By VERY REVEREND ALEXANDER CHRISTIE
Archbishop of Oregon.

THE EASTER appeal going forth from the Catholic pulpit from year to year should be adapted to the moral and intellectual condition of society. With this principle to guide us, we would affirm that it is useful at the present day to emphasize the fact that Christ's resurrection is the convincing proof of the truth and finality of the Christian religion.

The fact that saddens the man of faith today is that the non-Christian world is not doing justice to the evidences of Christianity. Instead of considering with serious and reverent attention the grand, luminous facts which prove Christianity to be the divine, the ultimate religion of the race, men are frittering away their time and their lives in the pursuit of the ephemeral systems which have naught to commend them but their novelty and the bold presumption of their erratic prophets.

Man by the very law of his being believes in God, in immortality, in free will, in moral responsibility, and all human experience finds true expression in the declaration of the Savior: "Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God." In truth, religion is the deepest instinct of the human soul, and the spiritual needs of man are as real and imperative as the hunger and thirst of his body.

In the providence of God the resurrection was to be the crowning evidence in support of Christ's character and claims. St. Paul identified the whole cause of Christianity with the reality of this all-important fact. "If Christ be not risen from the dead, our preaching is vain, and your faith is also vain." The importance of the fact in Christian evidences cannot be overestimated. As to the reality of the resurrection, we can only repeat what the Christian apologist has maintained and established from time immemorial. The books of the New Testament are trustworthy documents and the evidence they furnish of the event of Easter morn is convincing beyond the range of reasonable doubt.

The resurrection established Christianity as the ultimate religion of the race. This means that the gospel of Christ is the teaching of infinite wisdom and that the doctrines of Christianity are necessarily and permanently true.

And after all is a fantastic religion of probabilities suited to the exigencies of man's moral and intellectual life? Is there any consolation in praying to an unknown and unknowable Father who may be in heaven? any sufficient and compelling reason for being noble in conduct, if judgment after death is but a possible contingency? Are we to expect that men will put up with the grinding drudgery of being perseveringly good, will resist the fierce onslaught of passion in all its forms, will fight the good fight and never give up, if the outcome of the whole enterprise is highly problematical. No. Faith, firm and absolute, has ever been the mainspring of virtue and noble enterprise. The lives and the work which the world is wont to look upon with emotion and admiration were the product of a deep and living faith. It is faith that begets the philanthropy of all ages; faith that inspires art, that consecrates music, that ennobles literature; faith that transformed society and built upon the ruins of paganism our humanitarian civilization. In a word, faith has ever been the victory overcoming the world.

And when we stop to consider the reasonableness of Christianity's answer to life's problems, as compared with the solutions offered by the typical apostles of so-called free thought, we shall have little reason to make apology for the faith that is in us. Christianity teaches that an infinitely perfect Creator gave existence to the world, that the moral and religious instincts of man throw light on the meaning and end of his existence and that in revealed religion and all that it involves we have precisely what might be expected from a study of our inner selves and the recorded experience of the great human family.

Subsequent to the fact of Christian revelation we have nineteen centuries of Christian history, and this same history is a vindication of the divinity of the Christian religion. There is no adequate explanation for the phenomena of the Christian era but the one which Christianity gives in accounting for its own origin, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst."

We boast of enlightenment in our day, but the truth is that our culture is more apparent than real, more superficial than solid. There was never so large and so general a diffusion of bad philosophy and religious error as at the present day. The highly wrought individualism of our day makes every man a self-appointed teacher, and the euphemism of "free thought" has sublimated every sort of absurdity for the airy philosophers who glory in their own conclusions. A sincere, self-sacrificing love of truth is a rare virtue, and they are most flippant in their indictment of Christianity who know least what Christianity is and what credentials it enfolds.

The difference between the religion of Christ and the negative, cold, unfeeling theories of hostile critics is this, that Christianity is a preachable, workable, satisfactory plan of life, congenial to the highest and holiest instinct of our soul, consoling to our sorrows, helpful and hope-giving in all the untoward circumstances of life. It makes man realize that he is the direct and personal object of God's tender solicitude and love, that he was redeemed by the incarnate Son of God, and that in the Easter triumph of his Savior he has the pledge of his own future victory over suffering and death.

It is hard to see how any well-disposed man can find it in his heart to say that the hopeless, chilling philosophy which makes man an excited atom on the face of a heedless and unheeding sphere has more to recommend it to the mind and heart of man than the teachings of Jesus, the Savior. It is hard to see how men can make themselves believe that the conquering world-wide fact of Christianity could have been the chance product of a mythical resurrection, a dozen half-demented apostles and a handful of fable. If the unbeliever would pause to consider the number and character of the absurdities inherent in his system he would be overwhelmed by the breadth and depth of his own credulity.

No; the strongest argument against Christianity is not to be found in philosophy, in history, in the promptings of our own moral and mental life. The difficulty with Christianity, the circumstance that makes it a "hard saying," is this, that it imposes obligations. A luxury-loving world, immersed in the pleasures of sense, has little relish for elementary duties of Christian living. Purity, humility, self-denial, prayer, alms-giving—these are the things that sadden the heart of the worldling and dull his ear to the teachings of Jesus, the Master. Christianity is living and doing as well as believing, and man must be true to the promptings of his conscience before he is meet to profit by the word of eternal life. "Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God." These words of our blessed Lord summarize the whole issue. If men are blameless in daily life, earnest in the pursuit of truth and well disposed to fulfill its obligations, the intellectual difficulties of Christianity speedily melt away. And then, instead of having to shape their lives according to the tentative, timorous behests of fluctuating probabilities, they will have the strong anchorage of Christian faith and Christian hope, and the sweet solace of Christian love.

But if Easter if a reproach to the dilettante unbeliever, it is a trumpet call to those who have the faith. "If ye be risen with Christ," says St. Paul, "seek the things that are above." It is our duty to prosper the cause of Christ by leading lives worthy of our profession. To the practical man of affairs, steadfast integrity is the best argument for Christian truth, and our Lord himself approves this method of appeal when he urges us to "so let our light shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify their Father in heaven." If we were all Christians in fact as well as in name, we would do much in our day to further the work for which Christ suffered, died and rose on Easter morn. To sanctify our own souls and the souls of those about us, the transcendent excellence of this work has its vindication in Christ's resurrection from the dead. The essence of the truly successful life is neither name nor learning nor riches, but the fulfillment of each day's duties according to the mind of Christ, to serve whom is to reign both in time and in eternity. "If ye be risen with Christ, seek the things that are above."

The Message of Easter

By RIGHT REVEREND CHARLES SCADDING
Episcopal Bishop for Oregon

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his great mercy, begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. I Peter 1:3-5 (R. V.).

DIVINE life is invincible. Immortal hope tunes the ample song, for the final thought of God, in connection with that "one divine, far-off event, toward which all creation moves."

As the light of a cloudless morning, breaks with indescribable glory, beyond the mass of visible vapor, that draped the star-jeweled night, so life's glad day, born amid songs of triumphant hope, shall be found beyond the night of death, moistened by the dews of our earth-born grief. Death is the servant of life.

All children of God, wrapped in the swaddling garment of human flesh, may find it so, even though they be "children crying in the night, children crying for the light," for though they be children of mortality, even more are they children of immortality. To the better part of man even despair itself, which is never quite despair, may only be the shadow of the larger hope, waiting to bring an inspiring doxology into life, while all the guardian angels of truth have kept their ceaseless vigils through the night, singing, "weeping may tarry through the night, but joy cometh in the morning." Any person may find it so. The man who wrote our text had found it so. Peter had been an imperfect man, but a perfect hope may glow down upon an imperfect soul. Peter had not discovered himself. The good within him had fallen amid the debris of failure. His mercurial fidelity had given place to miserable infidelity. Cowardice had thrown its shivering sword at fleeing courage. Boasting of his loyalty to Christ at one time, at another time he had denied his Lord, and that shameful denial had placed self-erected barriers between himself and Christ. Even his penitential tears seemed to fall like ice upon his hot heart. In spite of all, the crucifixion of Christ had quickly followed his so-called trial, where justice had been a libel upon that word, and might seemed to triumph over right, and death and shame had claimed the Lord of life and glory, and a borrowed tomb held the body of him who had been seated upon the highest throne in glory, before he came to the lowest place on earth. It was a dark night. Peter's consuming grief seemed able to do so little for him; but it did, at least, save him from Judas-like despair.

There is a difference in men, in their essential nature, even amid the greatest failures in life. But, still, Christ was dead. Christianity was buried with him. Gone was the greatest enterprise that earth had ever known. The hands that had come to turn the turbulent streams of the centuries, and lift empires from their rusty hinges, and bear a saved world back to the bosom of infinite love, were still and cold in death. So it seemed. But, in reality, Christ was only sleeping through the cool, sweet night after the heat and strain of this conflict. He awoke. He arose. He triumphed over death. He appeared to his disciples. He was especially mindful of Peter, because Peter specially needed him. Heaven ever offers the greatest help to those who most need that help, and the best is often found next to that which seems to be the worst. The gladdest may be nearest the saddest

Lift up your heads, ye sorrowing ones,
And be ye glad of heart,
For Calvary day, and Easter day,
Were just one day apart.

The defeated, but delivered, servant of Christ had passed from darkness into ineffable light, and a doxology passed through his sensitive soul as a thrill of heaven. The light of Easter day had driven away the darkness of Calvary day, and the song of this man's life was full of the living hope.

Easter is the birthday anniversary of the world's new hope. It is not a day of gloom, but of gladness; it is not a day of sorrow, but of joy; it is not so much a day for thoughts of death, as of life; it is not so much a day for metaphysical and profound arguments about the resurrection of the physical body, as one for the acknowledgment of the supreme fact of life, with its own immortal phenomena, and unchallenged attestations, that, while "life evermore is built on death," the better life is found through death and beyond death.

It is on through all the vast chain of being in the whole cosmic process, and in the gradations of mystery leading up to man, as a spiritual entity, differentiating his species of life from all others in distinct identity with the spiritual nature of God. As we go from the lower to the higher, and as the greater includes the lesser of which it is composed, and as the whole is equal to all its parts, so Christianity's larger and better life, and its living hope beyond the death and resurrection of Christ. Hence the origin and nature of the world's supreme hope, even the living hope.

Its origin is in heaven, and not of earth. Earth could have afforded no such hope as this. Humanity could not have invented it. Without God, it were impossible. Without Christ, to man, it were unthinkable. It demands the personal equation of the character of Christ. Without spiritual aptitude and receptivity for God, it were an unknown quality and quantity of the highest life in the world. Without an experience of spiritual and eternal life while we still inhabit these immortal bodies, it were well-nigh preposterous, even to a rational mind and a credulous faith. But give us God and Christ, and spiritual life, then we have that which is infinitely more than all arguments for, or against, the physical resurrection of Christ, and of all whose natural bodies "sleep in him," and hope, ever this living hope, reveals its origin in God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Christian religion utters the word, "blessed," before the majesty and power of his character.

These facts once granted, then what follows? This, assuredly this: Like produces like, like partakes of the nature of like. This living hope, being born of the life of God, is like the life of God. The life of God in its essential content, Jesus Christ is its foundation, the Holy Spirit its assurance, and the new birth of the individual soul its immortal product, and a spiritual experience of eternal life as a present-tense possession its unanswerable argument.

Our text tells us of the object of this living hope. It is an inheritance. Here three descriptive, and almost synonymous words are used to convey the underlying idea of permanence. These words tell us that the inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and that it fadeth not away. Certainly! It could not be otherwise, if it is it to be in correspondence with God, and his immortal offspring. Here the law of spiritual correspondence and affinity is inviolable. The province of this living hope is not limited to man, nor yet to the things which God has reserved for us. Residing in the spiritual excellence of those who know the new birth, even more does it locate in the heart of God, our Father, and he is, as Paul says, the "God of hope."

There is a deep and beautiful sense in which the ambitions of God are fixed upon man. He does not look down from heaven and despair of us, even amid our failures, but he dwells in us, and becomes also the divine environment of our lives, and, keeping our inheritance (whatever that may be, for us until the time arrives for us to enter into the same. He likewise guards us by his power, that the inheritors and the inheritance may at last meet in fullest measure and perpetual realization. He never despairs of his divine enterprise in our creation, redemption, salvation and perfection. He saves us, not only from sin, but from death, so that it is not the Christian, but death itself, that dies. Concerning the Christian, as well as the Christ in him, may be said: "Death hath no more dominion over him."

From these considerations, we should, therefore, conclude:

First—This living hope is God's unchangeable answer and eternal pledge to that universal craving for a complete and perfect life.

Second—That, even as Christianity, which is pre-eminently the religion of optimism, has no more optimistic note than that which this living hope brings, the only mood and attitude of this living hope is optimism, which grasps the Fatherhood of God, as His own final thought and follows the logic of his life, and love, and power, to their own relentless conclusions, with all its contents, for the whole family of God.

Third—The deepest meaning and the supreme prerogative of Easter must ever be found in the fact that it evokes, intensifies and perpetuates a more profound appreciation of this living hope, with all of that for which it stands. We should appreciate this hope, itself; we should appreciate the inheritance, which is more than heaven as a state, or condition; we should appreciate, and love more than ever, God, the Father, who is the author of this hope; God, the Son, who is the foundation of this hope; God, the Holy Spirit, who is the revelator of this hope.

This is the deepest, richest and sublimest meaning of Easter.

Therefore, in the sanctuary of the individual soul, where God comes to bring the life of heaven today, let us rejoice and be glad, and sing as our Easter doxology, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you (us), who, by the power of God are guarded through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

A Living Hope

By REVEREND LUTHER R. DYOTT, D. D.
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Resurrection, Not Elevation.

ARE we "risen with Christ?" The resurrection is not merely an historical fact; it is a principle of spiritual energy. It is a **moral** change. It is not merely a movement, a shifting of spiritual position from a lower to a higher point in the same sphere. That would be an elevation—not a resurrection. A resurrection is a transfer from one state to another. It is necessary to remark this distinction, because an elevation in thought, or morals, is sometimes described as if it were a resurrection of faith and life. Felix, Agrippa, Emperor Julian, Rousseau, were all "elevated" by Christianity, but were not risen with Christ. This is a distinction which is vital. He who does not mark it, misses the force of the Easter message. We enter into this "resurrection life" just in so far as we are in union with our **living** Lord. Let us try to understand the scriptural assurance of how this can be.

A Spiritual Body.

The body of the Lord before and after the resurrection was the same body. The body of a man in the prime of his life is the same body as the body with which he was born and with which he will die, whatever material or physical changes in it there may be. The body of the future will be the same body as the body of the present life. But its condition will be greatly changed. As for the Lord, so for us, it will be a body "in corruption," "in glory," "in power," "spiritual."

Holy baptism is described by St. Paul as the means whereby Christ unites us to his sacred body. "In one spirit were we all baptized into one body." "In my baptism," the child is directed to say in the catechism, "I was made a member of Christ." Such union with a dead body, or with a merely natural body, if living, is inconceivable. The explanation is simple when we understand the spiritual faculties of the risen body of Christ.

Again, in the Holy Eucharist, Christians receive the body and blood of Christ. "This is my body, this is my blood," are the Lord's own words. In the church catechism we learn that "the inward part or thing signified is the body and blood of Christ, which are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's supper." What would communion or reception of a dead body mean? What would communion or reception of a merely natural body mean? It is not surprising that in misunderstanding, some have shrunk back with perplexity, or disregard, or horror, or unbelief. The communion or reception of the spiritual body of the living Christ is a vastly different thing. In the spiritual powers of his risen manhood he is a fount of life unto the soul. In our "continual remembrance of the death of Christ" we plead before the Father the body and blood, the sacred manhood, of the Lord, who, for our salvation, has passed through death. We claim in the "remembrance" all the merits of his passion and death. But it is not his dead body and blood, his dead manhood, which we plead. It is the living Christ of the resurrection morning, who said, "I am the resurrection and the life," who is on the altar in our midst, whom we present before the Father's throne, whom we receive into our bodies and souls in our communion. He is indeed the Christ of Calvary, as he is the Christ of Bethlehem. He is indeed the lamb that has been slain. But he is also the **living Lord**, who is "alive for evermore," who holds "the keys of death."

The Message of Easter.

The Easter message, then, is essentially that Christianity is **union with a living person.** Herein lies the great distinction between Christianity and all other religions. Other religions teach some truths; other religions contain some elements of moral conduct. To deny this would involve blindness to facts, and forgetfulness of the revelation to the Jews, that God "left not himself without witness" in the heathen world, and that all men are still created in the image of God. But whatever other religions may possess, they have not "faith in Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life," and they do not convey union with God through a living person. For the Christian there, by the working of the Holy Ghost, there is the presence of the incarnate Lord. That presence in all its fullness requires that he is, at this moment, perfect man in body and in soul, as well as very and eternal God.

The risen body of Christ is the link between us and the death of Christ, because it is the body wherein he died. It is the link between us and the intercession of Christ in heaven, because it is the body wherein he pleads there and wherein he is present here. As we present the sacrifice on the earthly altar, we enter into the heavenly worship in which he is the high priest and the prevailing victim, in which he pleads "the one sacrifice of himself for sins for ever." In the spiritual powers of his risen life space is nothing. We are in him, and therefore we are with him at the heavenly altar. He is in us, and therefore he is with us at the earthly altar on earth. Into his own life we are uplifted. In the merits of his incarnation, his days of work and nights of prayer, his passion and death, his resurrection and ascension and heavenly pleading we have part.

Test of Love.

One of the fruits of this "resurrection life," as well as one of its evidences, is love. "We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love." This, then, is at once the cure for death, and the business of life—to learn to love; and if we would learn, we must practice. Life is full of opportunities. We learn to love every day by taking our trials, by standing our vexations, by bearing with the sordid and petty souls by whom we may be surrounded; above all, by trying to help them, by trying to understand their unconscious wants. There are 10,000 unconscious wants around you—in the stupid people who bore you, in the frivolous people who try you, in the malicious people who revile you, in the pleasure-seeking rabble; deep down there are wants in all. Love does still work miracles. It raises dead souls to life. Now as always the real test of true religion is not religiousness, nor orthodoxy, nor anything else, but love.

Follow Me.

Being "risen with Christ," we are to "seek things above," and the way to seek things above is to listen to and obey the still small voice of that indwelling presence as it whispers, "follow me." Life is full of enigmas, mysteries, uncertainties and perplexities; but our Lord can solve these enigmas and mysteries, for you go not to a dead Christ, but to one who is risen indeed. Go to him, then at every turn and twist of your life, as humbly as the child Samuel, and say, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." You will have a conscientiousness that his hand is stretched back to lead you to him, and you will hear his loving voice whisper, "follow me." Whatever uncertainty there may be about your "seeking things above," all is made clear when you hear him say, "follow me"; and all dark clouds of doubt and mystery are rolled away at the rising of this eternal sun, as some one has beautifully expressed it in the following lines:

Our dim eyes seek a beacon,
And our weary feet a guide,
And our hearts of all life's mysteries
Seek a meaning and a Key;
But a cross shines on our pathway,
On it hangs the crucified;
And he answers all our longings
With the whisper: "Follow me."
Life is a duty—dare it.
Life is a burden—bear it.
Life is a thorny crown—wear it
Though it break thy heart in twain,
Though the burden bear thee down,
Close thy lips and stand the pain,
First the cross and then the crown.