

The Life of God

**A Study of the
Resurrection
and the
Sacraments of Initiation**

A Bridegroom Press Scripture Study

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Introduction

The Resurrection accounts were clearly written by four different witnesses, for each account tells us different aspects of the event. While this brings about the appearance of difference, there are several ways to harmonize the different accounts into one coherent narrative. As we work our way through Matthew's telling of the event, we will see how the earliest Christians dealt with the difficulties as they drew meaning from the events.

Once we have been apprenticed in understanding Scripture from the perspectives of those who were personally taught by the Apostles or their immediate successors, we will then take this information and use it to discover the Scriptural bases for three sacraments: baptism, confirmation and Eucharist. These three sacraments are called "the sacraments of initiation." Together, they consecrate and form the human person into an image of Christ Himself.

Like the teaching on the Trinity, which is not explicitly presented anywhere in Scripture, much of the evidence for the sacraments is found not in explicit statements, but in a deeper literal, allegorical, moral and heavenly reading of the Word of God. Without this understanding – an understanding possessed by the writers of the New Testament – it is nearly impossible to come to a true appreciation of how rich the Scriptural bases for liturgy and sacraments is. By working through the thirty-five sessions of this study, we hope you come to appreciate the richness and depth of Scripture, and the beauty of the means by which God has informed us of His work among us.

Week 1

Day 1: Matthew 28:1 – After the Sabbath

Catechism references:

500 – “brothers of Christ”

2174 – Resurrection day is new creation

Scripture references:

Luke 8:2-3 – Mary Magdalene, Joanna

Many early Christians recognized that John’s Gospel could be taken to mean that the women appeared at a different time than Matthew’s Gospel indicated. After all, John says Mary Magdalene came “while it was still dark” (John 20:1), while Matthew and Luke talk of the women arriving at daybreak, and Mark says they arrived “very early at the sun’s rising.” While it was pointed out that sunrise was often still rather a dark time of day, Remigius felt it also pointed to a deeper meaning. Evening darkens into night, but the light of the Lord’s resurrection shed joy and brilliance over the whole of this night. Bede agreed, “From the beginning of the creation of the world until now, the course of time has followed this arrangement, that the day should go before the night, because man, fallen by sin from the light of paradise, has sunk into the darkness and misery of this world. But now it is appropriate that night goes before day, for, through faith in the resurrection, we are brought back from the darkness of sin and the shadow of death to the light of life, by the bounty of Christ.” Chrysologus, also known as St. Peter of Ravenna or Severianus, saw a similar meaning, “The sabbath is not dimmed by Christ but is illuminated as He prophesied, “I am not come to destroy the Law, but to fulfil it.” [Matt 5:17] It is illuminated that it may lighten into the Lord’s day, and shine forth in the Church, when it had hitherto burnt dim, and been obscured by the Synagogue.”

Questions for Study:

1. Although Scripture only tells us that seven demons were driven out of Mary Magdalene (Mark 16:9, Luke 8:2), tradition tells us that she was a prostitute. Given the state of humanity prior to the Cross and the fact that Christ is the Bridegroom, why might we say Mary represents every one of us? The seven demons were driven out by Christ. What sanctifying actions might correspond to this in the Church's ministry today?
2. How would the Catechism reference on this verse help you explain the phrase "brothers of Christ"?
3. How do you think Chrysologus would reply to someone who said Catholics should celebrate the Sabbath on Saturday, not Sunday?

Day 2: Matthew 28:2 – The Earthquake

Chrysologus likewise saw deep significance in the fact that the two Marys came to the tomb. In the tomb, he saw a foreshadowing of the sealed womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the two women, He saw the two Eves, the Eve of Genesis is like Mary Magdalene, a participant in the downfall of humanity, while the New Eve is the other Mary, through whom God came into the world. "In paradise the first Eve had taken up unbelief, from the sepulchre she hastens to take up faith; she now hastens to snatch life from death, who had before snatched death from life. And it is not, 'They come,' but 'came,' (in the singular,) for in mystery and not by accident, the two came under one name. She came altered; a woman changed in life, not just in name; in virtue, but not in sex.

The women go before the Apostles, bearing to the Lord's sepulchre a reminder of the Church. For Mary is the name of Christ's mother; and one name is twice repeated for two women, because this is a foreshadowing

of the Church coming out of the two nations, the Gentiles and the Jews, and being yet one. Mary came to the sepulchre, as to the womb of the resurrection, that Christ might be the second time born out of the sepulchre of faith, who after the flesh had been born of her womb; and that as a virgin had borne Him into this life present, so a sealed sepulchre might bring Him forth into life eternal. It is proof of Deity to have left a womb virgin after birth, and no less to have come forth in the body from a closed sepulchre.”

Hilary saw the earthquake as a sign of the power of the resurrection, while Bede noticed that the Gospels tell of two earthquakes: one at the Crucifixion and one at the Resurrection. He saw this as a signal “that worldly hearts must be first moved to penitence by a health-giving fear through belief in His Passion and Resurrection.” Chrysologus took this theme even further: “If the earth thus quaked when the Lord rose again to the pardon of the Saints, how will it quake when He shall rise again to the punishment of the wicked? As the Prophet speaks, ‘The earth trembled when the Lord rose again to judgment.’ And how will it endure the Lord’s presence, when it was unable to endure the presence of His Angel? ‘And the Angel of the Lord descended from heaven.’ For when Christ arose, death was destroyed, commerce with heaven is restored to things on the earth; and woman, who had first held communication to death with the Devil, now holds communication to life with the Angel.

Questions for Study:

1. Chrysologus lived from 406-450 A.D. What would you say to someone who believed the doctrine of Mary’s perpetual virginity is something the Catholic Church invented in the Middle Ages?
2. Chrysologus quotes Psalm 18:7. What sacrament is foretold in Psalm 18:16?
3. Some people say Jesus is not God, He is just

St. Michael the archangel. Does it appear that Chrysologus holds this opinion?

Day 3: Matthew 28:2 – The Angel

As Bede points out, the angel does not roll back the stone in order to let Jesus out of the tomb, rather, he rolls it back to give evidence that Jesus had already risen, “For He who as mortal had power to enter the world through the closed womb of a Virgin, He when become immortal, was able to depart out of the world by rising from a sealed sepulchre.” The Ten Commandments were written on tablets of stone. Remigius, recalls this when he draws another conclusion from the event, “The rolling back of the stone signifies the opening of Christ’s sacraments, which were covered by the letter of the Law. For the Law having been written on stones, is here denoted by the stone.”

Chrysologus goes on to say that the angel’s movement changes the order of things. “The Tomb devours death, and not the dead; the house of death becomes the mansion of life; a new law is imposed upon it, it receives a dead, and renders up a living, man.” The women needed to understand that things had changed. Thus, the angel “sat down. Angels are incapable of weariness; but he sat as a teacher of the faith, a master of the Resurrection; upon the stone, that the firmness of his seat might assure the steadfastness of the believers; the Angel rested the foundations of the Faith upon that rock, on which Christ was to found His Church.” The stone also represented “death, the Angel by sitting upon it, shows that Christ has by His might subdued death.”

Augustine, who worked hard at reconciling apparent discrepancies in Scripture recognizes that another difficulty is found in this passage. “It may disquiet some, how it is that according to Matthew though the Angel sat upon the stone after it had been rolled back from the sepulchre, whereas Mark says that the women

went into the sepulcher and saw a young man sitting on the right hand. It is possible that they saw two, angels: Matthew did not mention the one whom they saw within the tomb, while Mark did not mention the one they saw outside. Or the words, “entering into the sepulchre,” {Mark 16:5] may mean entering into some enclosed place, which probably there might be in front of the rock out of which the sepulchre was hewn; and thus it might be the same Angel whom they saw sitting inside on the right hand, whom Matthew describes as sitting on the stone he had rolled back.

Questions for Study:

1. Bede died in 735 A.D. What Marian doctrine does he provide further evidence for? In what sense is Jesus mortal? If Jesus is already God, in what sense is He “become immortal?”
2. Read 2 Corinthians 3:4-18. What connection does Paul draw between stone, the Law, and death? Is Bede’s commentary faithful to Paul’s understanding?
3. Read Matthew 22:30. Does Chrysologus’ reading resonate with what Jesus tells the Sadducees?

Day 4: Matthew 28:3-7 – The Angel and Fear

Catechism references:

652 – Resurrection fulfilled prophecy

Scripture references:

1 Cor 15:14-19 – Faith depends on His rising

The angel who announced Jesus’ resurrection bore in himself signs of both God and man. Chrysologus explains, “The splendour of his face is distinct from the shining of his clothes; his face is compared to lightning, his raiment to snow. Lightning is in heaven, snow is on the earth; as the Prophet says, ‘Praise the Lord from the earth; fire and hail, snow and vapours.’ [Psalm 148:7]

Thus the Angel's face preserves the splendour of his heavenly nature, while his clothing shows the grace of human communion with God. For the appearance of the Angel that talked with them is carefully arranged so that human eyes might endure the silent splendour of his robes, and by reason of his shining face they might tremble before the messenger of their Maker... But why is an angel, who needs no clothing, covered? The Angel figures our dress, our shape, our likeness in the Resurrection, when man is sufficiently clothed by the splendour of his own body.

Why did the guards tremble in fear when the women did not? Anyone who does not have the faith of love will be shaken with a panic fear when they confront signs of God. The men who refused to believe the truth of the resurrection "become" themselves "as dead men." The guards kept watch over His Body not out of affection for Him, but out of cruelty, to prevent others from approaching Him. No man can stand who is forsaken by his own conscience, or troubled with a sense of guilt. Hence the Angel confounds the wicked, and comforts the good. As Chrysologus relates, "their faith had been bowed by the cruel storm of His Passion, so that they sought Him crucified and dead. The angel acknowledges their misunderstanding 'I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified,' and tells them what they need to know to correct it, 'He is not here.' Thus the Angel first announces His name, declares His Cross, and confesses His Passion; but straightway proclaims Him risen and their Lord. He says, 'Which was crucified,' and points out the place where the Lord was laid, that they should not think that someone else had risen from the dead. And if the Lord reappears in the same flesh, and gives evidence of His resurrection, why should man suppose that he himself shall reappear in other flesh? Or why should a slave disdain his own flesh, seeing the Lord did not change ours?

As much as to say, 'Woman, now thou art healed,

return to the man, and persuade him to faith, whom thou didst once persuade to treachery. Carry to man the proof of the Resurrection, to whom thou didst once carry counsel of destruction.’ “

Questions for Study:

1. Adam and Eve were naked in the Garden without shame (Gen 2:25), they only clothed themselves after the Fall (Gen 3:7, 3:21). When we are in heaven, we will have even more glory than Adam and Eve prior to the Fall. Does Chrysologus think anyone in heaven will wear clothes?
2. Read Exodus 3:2-4. Who appears as fire? Whose voice speaks? Angels are messengers, they speak with God’s voice. How is the change effected on a man by the sacrament of Holy Orders similar to the way God uses angels? How is it different?
3. Does Chrysologus appear to believe in reincarnation? Can Catholics believe in such a concept?

Day 5: Matthew 28:8-10 – “Hail”

Catechism references:

- 641 – Women first meet the Risen One
- 645 – Glorified Body
- 654 – Paschal Mystery’s Two Aspects

The Greek word Jesus used to greet the women here is “Hail” or “chairou.” The word is used only six times in Scripture – it is used when the angel greets Mary at the annunciation (Luke 1:28), it is used by Judas when he greets Christ in the garden, it is used by the soldiers who mock Christ, and it is used here. It is a royal greeting, used to Mary because she is Queen of Heaven, used by Judas and the soldiers to mis-represent Jesus’ kingship, and used here by Jesus with the women in order

to inform them that they are made a royal priesthood by His resurrection. Thus, Jerome says, "The women ought first to hear this 'Hail,' that the curse of the woman Eve may be removed in these women."

Chrysologus continues to draw out the fact that these women represent the full figure of the Church, "Christ convinces His disciples when in doubt concerning the Resurrection, and confirms them when in fear; and when He meets them He does not terrify them by His power, but holds them with the power of love. And Christ in His Church salutes Himself, for He has taken it into His own Body."

When Mary supposed Him to be "the gardener," [John 20:15] she was not permitted to touch Him. Now, when He meets her again, she has not only permission to touch, but to hold Him. He rose when the tomb was closed, to demonstrate that the body that was dead was now immortal. He now offers His feet to be held by the women, to show that He had real flesh, which can be touched by mortal creatures.

Questions for Study:

1. Name some of the reasons Jesus might have had in choosing to appear to women.
2. Read Genesis 3:23, Romans 5:14 and 1 Cor 15:42-49. Why might Mary Magdalene have mistaken the risen Christ for a gardener?
3. Read Romans 4:25. Many Christians believe that when Christ said, "It is finished" on the Cross, He was speaking about the work of our justification and redemption. Does Paul agree with this idea?