

Guerric of Igny, Abbot of Igny, d. ca. 1157 (From Liturgical Sermons, Cistercian publications, 1971) Sermon 33: The First Sermon for Easter

THEY TOLD JACOB: "*Joseph is still alive.*" (Gen 45:25ff) When he heard it his spirit revived and he said: "*It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.*" Perhaps you will say to me: "Very good, but what is the point of that? Has this any connection with today's joy and the triumph of Christ's resurrection? Remember that it is Paschal time. Are you going to feed us with Lenten fare again? Our soul hungers for the Paschal Lamb, the one for whom it has prepared itself by fasting all this time. Our heart is burning within for Jesus. (Lk 24:32) It is Jesus we desire even if we do not yet merit to see him or listen to him. It is Jesus we are hungering for, not Joseph; the Redeemer, not the dreamer; the Lord of heaven, not of Egypt. Not the one who fills the belly, but he who nourishes the mind, the hungry mind. Your sermon will at least help us in this way; it will make us even more hungry for him whom we already desire. For we read: '*Blessed are they who hunger, for they shall be filled.*' (Mt 5:6) When we hear this we hunger yet more. One who praises the banquet sharpens the hunger of his hearers. If we hear about Jesus it will be joy and happiness for us to listen. Our very bones, humbled in the dust, will be exalted to the skies. Our bones have been humbled by the penance and mourning of Lent, more indeed by the sorrows of his passion, but they will rejoice even more at the news of his resurrection. Why then do you continue to feed us on Joseph? No subject you speak of unless it be Jesus, will hold any satisfaction for us, especially today when the Paschal Lamb is eaten, "*when Christ our pasch has been sacrificed.*" (I Cor 5:7)

2. What I have placed before you, brethren, is like an egg or a nut; break the shell and you will find the food. Beneath the image of Joseph you will find the Paschal Lamb, Jesus, the one for whom you yearn. The great depth at which he is hidden and the diligence necessary in seeking him and the difficulty you will have in finding him will only make him all the sweeter to your taste. Again you insist: "What has Joseph to do with Christ? What has this story I have put before you got to do with today's feast?" Much in every way. (Rom 3:2) Run through the details, and the loving meaning of the mystery will reveal itself to you, provided that it is Jesus who expounds the mystery to you, who on this day of his resurrection discussed with his disciples on the road to Emmaus the letter that kills (2 Cor 3:6) and then expounded the Scriptures to them. (Lk 24:27) For which one of the Prophets of Patriarchs is more clearly and distinctly a type of the Savior than Joseph? "*Give the wise man an opportunity,*" we are told, "*and he will increase his wisdom.*" (Prov 9:9) And so here is the

explanation in a nutshell. If we think with faith and reverence about the meaning of his name (Gen 30:24) and go on to consider that he was more handsome and good-looking than the rest of his brothers, (Gen 39:6) that his actions were blameless, that he was prudent in his judgments, that after he had been sold by his own he redeemed his own from death, that he was humbled even to imprisonment, then elevated to a throne, and was rewarded for his work by being given a new name among the nations -- the Savior of the World (Gen 41:45) -- if we think, I say, about all these things reverently and faithfully, we shall surely recognize how truly it was said by the Lord: "*Through the Prophets I gave parables.*" (Hos 12:10)

3. And now if we go back to the words I quoted at the beginning, I do not think they will need any further explanation. Rather they will inspire both wonder and joy because the resurrection of Christ is so plainly witnessed to by the Law and the Prophets. (Rom 3:21) The story from the Old Testament speaks so clearly of the mysteries of the New that when the prophecy is read it is almost as if we were listening to the gospel, apart from the change in names. "*They told Jacob: 'Joseph is still alive.'*" (Gen 45:26) What else can I take this to mean than: "They told the Apostles: 'Jesus is still alive.'"? Jacob I take to be none other than the band of the Apostles. Nor do I consider this explanation far fetched. Not only are they descendants of Jacob, not only have they been changed from Jacob into Israel when they passed from the wrestling of the active life to the vision and rest of contemplation, (Gen 32:23ff) but also they are the fathers of the multitude of those who believe, the true Israelites, just as he was father of the Israelites according to the flesh. (Gen 35:11) Thus they sorrowed just as he did and could not be consoled when they thought that their Joseph was dead. When they heard that he was alive they came to believe it only slowly and with difficulty. But when at length they realized it was true their joy was unbounded.

And they told Jacob: "*Joseph is still alive.*" Jacob hearing this awoke as it were from a deep sleep, yet did not believe them. (Gen 45:26) This seems to me to be no more than a different presentation of the account that we read in the Gospels: "*She (obviously Mary Magdalen) went and told those who had been with him as they mourned and wept. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it. After this he appeared to two of them as they were going along the road. And they went back and told the rest, but they did not believe them either.*" (Mk 16:10ff) And in Luke we read: "*Returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest, but their words sounded like madness to them and they did not believe them.*" (Lk 24:9,11) The obvious reason for this is that they were only just awakening from the deep sleep of weariness and despair.

"But when Jacob saw all that Joseph had sent him," it goes on to say, his spirit revived and he said: "It is not enough, Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die." (Gen 45:27ff) And so too with the apostles. Words had no effect on them until they received the gifts. For when Jesus himself came and stood before them, he convinced them not so much by showing them his body as by breathing on them his Gift.

4. You know that when he came to them the doors were locked and he stood among them, but they were startled and frightened and supposed they saw a spirit. (Jn 20:26; Lk 24:36ff) But when he breathed on them saying: "Receive the Holy Spirit," (Jn 20:22ff) and when later he sent from heaven the same Spirit with another gift, these gifts were indeed undeniable proofs and testimonies of resurrection and life.

It is the Spirit who bears witness in the hearts and on the lips of the saints that Christ is the truth, (Jn 14:6) the true resurrection and the life. (Jn 11:25) Thus the Apostles who had previously doubted even after seeing his living body, after tasting his life-giving Spirit with great power gave testimony to his resurrection. (Acts 4:33) So it is much more important to receive Jesus in our hearts than to see him with our eyes or hear him with our ears. The Spirit makes a much deeper impression on the interior man than material things make on the exterior senses. What room is left for doubt when he who bears witness and he who is the object of that witness are the one Spirit? (1 Jn 5:6ff) If the Spirit is one there must be complete understanding, everything fits together.

Then indeed, as we read of Jacob, their spirit, almost dead from grief if not buried in despair, revived. Then, if I am not mistaken, each one of the Apostles said to himself: "It is enough for me that my Joseph is still alive, since for me to live means Christ and to die is gain. (Phil 1:21) I will therefore go into Galilee to the mountain where Jesus told us to meet him (Mt 28:16) and I will see and adore him before I die, so that afterwards I may never taste death." For everyone who sees the Son and believes in him has everlasting life, (Jn 6:40) so that even though he die, yet shall he live. (Jn 11:25)

5. Now, my brethren, what witness to Christ's love does the joy of your hearts give you? I venture to judge, and rightly as you will see, that if you have ever loved Jesus alive or dead or risen from the dead, your heart rejoices within you today. As the tidings of his resurrection resound and re-echo again and again through the Church you will say to yourselves: "They have told me that Jesus my God is still alive. On hearing it my spirit, which was asleep through timidity, has revived." For the joyful voice of this happy message raises even from death those buried deep in sin. Otherwise, if Christ, coming up from hell, left them

there in the depths, there would certainly be no hope for them; their fate would be buried in forgetfulness. By this token you may clearly know that your soul lives again fully in Christ if it echoes this sentiment: "It is enough for me that Jesus is still alive."

How faithful and worthy of a friend of Jesus is that voice, how pure that act of love which says: "It is enough for me that Jesus is still alive. If he lives, I live, for my spirit acts through his. Yes, he is my life, my all in all. For what can I lack if Jesus is still alive? Rather everything else may be taken from me, nothing else matters to me so long as he lives. If he wishes then, let him take no account of me. It is enough for me that he still lives even if he only lives for himself." When the love of Christ so absorbs all a man's affections that, unmindful and forgetful of himself, he has no feeling for anything but Jesus Christ and what pertains to him then, I say, love has been made perfect in him. To a man who so loves, poverty is no burden, he feels no hurt, laughs at insults, disdains misfortunes, considers death as a gain. (Phil 1:21) In fact he does not think in terms of death, knowing that he passes from death to life. And he confidently asserts: "I will go and see him before I die."

6. Although, my brethren, we have not been endowed with such a great purity of conscience, let us, nevertheless, go to see Jesus journeying to the mountain of the heavenly Galilee, where he awaits us. On the way our love will increase, and on our arrival, he awaits us. On the way our love will increase, and on our arrival, at least, it will be perfected. On the way, the road, at first hard and difficult, will grow easier, and the strength of the weak will increase. For to prevent Jacob or any of his household from excusing themselves from the journey there were sent to the poor old man besides other gifts, provisions and wagons in case anyone should plead poverty or weakness. The flesh of Christ is our food for the journey, his Spirit our means of conveyance. He himself is the food, he himself is the chariot and charioteer of Israel. (2 Kings 2:12) When you arrive, all the goods, not of Egypt but of heaven, will be yours. There, in the best place in the kingdom, at the bidding of your Joseph you will take your rest. he who first sent angels, women and apostles as witnesses and messengers of his resurrection, now cries from heaven: "Behold, I whom you have mourned as dead these three days did indeed die for you, but see, I live. (Rev 1:18) And all power in heaven and earth is given unto me. (Mt 28:18) Come to me all you that labor and are burdened with hunger, and I will refresh you. (Mt 11:28) Come you blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you." (Mt 25:34) May he who calls you lead you to where he lives and reigns with the Father and Holy Spirit, through endless ages. Amen.