

FEAST: Christian Joy in the Resurrection
George Koulomzin
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Man is losing his capacity to be glad. Next time you're walking down the street, look at the faces: how many of them are smiling that deep smile which says YES to all things? Consider yourself when you are on vacation from school. More than anything else you want to enjoy life, to forget the grind. You sit down to relax but so often find that you cannot. A strange compulsion to "do something" keeps you from any spontaneous enjoyment. When vacation is over, you find that you've wasted it; you've spent most of your time hypnotized in front of the television or wishing for some fun that you did not have.

Of course, the capacity for joy is not altogether lost: a certain "joie de vivre," as the French call it, still remains. For example, when good food and good company fill us with exuberance, we seem to recover joyousness. Breathing the wondrous magnificence of the forest from a mountaintop has somewhat of the same effect. But even so, these are isolated experiences, ones which fill particular moments only, and seemingly in spite of the general trend. Joy is the exception rather than the rule.

That this be true is perhaps the greatest tragedy of Christianity, for the central message of the Gospel (Gospel means "the good news") is that "The light shines in the darkness, and darkness has not overcome it." The sense of man's exuberance with life has roots deep into the Old Testament. The author of Genesis wrote that on the seventh day the Lord had surveyed His work, "and saw that it was good. And God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion...over all the earth.'" How can man not be joyful!

Man, however, was not satisfied with this simple joy. He sought the knowledge of good and evil. But when he found it, he also discovered the tragic pain accompanying this knowledge. The innocence of the garden was lost forever.

The Christian faith offers man the possibility to regain some of this graceful joy. It does so through the memory of the Resurrection and through feasts. A "Feast" is the primary Christian symbol of joy. Food, through the ages, has always meant to man more than mere physical sustenance—man's need for food always points, if only subconsciously, to man's hunger for life, for meaning, for joy. The fullness which food gives to man always reminds him of the spiritual fullness which he so desires. If for no other reason, this is why the meal still has such an important role in family life. And a "feast" is but a rich, abundant, joyful, partaking of food.

In ancient times feasts were often associated with the coming of spring. Men rejoiced over the first fruits of the earth, the first reward for their toils. Taking these first fruits to their feast, they celebrated the abundance of the world which gave them life. Christianity has adapted this idea of feast, but transformed it to also mean the celebrations of spiritual food. Communion, the Eucharist, is in a very important sense

exactly such a feast of spiritual food. The liturgy, focusing as it does on the Eucharist, can only be understood with the help of the idea of “feast.”

Easter is the Feast of Feasts. It celebrates the coming of joy into the world. Man used the most profound symbols of joy which they have, the Liturgy and the Feast, to commemorate the most joyful moment in history. But a feast is more than just a remembrance of a moment in history. Remembering joy brings joy again; the joy of the Resurrection enters once again into the world. Christ’s gift to men is not merely remembered, but renewed:

“Now are all things filled with light,
Heaven and earth are the places under the earth.
All creation does celebrate the Resurrection of Christ
On whom it is founded...”

What then is the significance of the Resurrection? It is the climax of Christ’s mission on earth. By His Resurrection not only is the world assured that “Truly this man was the Son of God!” but that the grasp of death, evil and joylessness on man is pried open. Through Christ man can begin to overcome all of these. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”

The Christian sense of joy is really much more than the “joie de vivre” mentioned earlier. “Joie de vivre” can be rather superficial along the lines of going to football games, parties, laughing, jokes, etc. Christian joy is more like that smile which says YES to all things. It comes from very deep within a person, from a very deep awareness that life is good and meaningful. Christian joy is aware of the pain and tragedy of life, but it is equally aware of the promise of salvation brought to man and confirmed on Easter. This spirit of life and joy radiates from within a person. Christ speaks of this when He says: “You are the light of the world...Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven.” This joyful radiance, sustained by the Liturgy and the Feasts (They are in many ways the same thing), and made possible by the Resurrection, is Christianity.