

The Greatest Christian Feast

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A law scholar asked Jesus to test him, “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” Jesus’ answer was straight and succinct: First love God above all things, second love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus further illustrates his answer, “The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:34-40). The scholar was a member of the Pharisees, who constantly criticized even accusing Jesus for not observing customs and rituals. The criticism of neglecting the customs included not washing hands, associating with the social outcasts, curing on the Sabbath, etc. Yet Jesus said that his coming to earth is to fulfill the law not to break it, rather to gather people to the Father. Jesus said, “And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself” (John 3:14-15; 12:32).

In our Easter Sunday context, we can pose a question to each other is, “Which is the greatest Christian feast?” There is no doubt most people will say that Christmas is the greatest Christian feast. People claim that not of what they learn in their catechism but what the consumer and secular society of North America has succeeded in influencing and convincing them. The reality is that the commercialized Christmas season does not draw us to the Lord, rather to the malls and online shopping. These practices have no spiritual values though gift sharing could be an act of love, especially when done with those in need.

The question persists. Which is the greatest Christian feast? The Easter Triduum: Holy Thursday, Good Friday and Holy Saturday leading to the Easter Sunday is the heart and soul of Christian identity. Easter Sunday is the climax of the Christian feast. In Church tradition, new members were baptized on Easter Vigil and incorporated into the body of Christ through Christian initiation through the process of preparation the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults or Children (RCIA/RCIC). All Christian feasts, celebrations and observations radiated backward and forward from Easter Sunday. Early Christians called it Sunday, 8th day, the completion of God’s creative and redemptive cycle.

In the Book of Genesis, God marvels at his own creation, “God saw that it was good.” Easter Sunday, as the 8th Day, is a sign of God’s perpetual covenant of our salvation, His comprehensive and inclusive restoration of the goodness of his original creation. The Ge’ez Rite hymn for Easter Sunday sums up God’s renewal of the natural world:

Alleluia, heaven is rejoicing, and the earth is glad,
Let the foundations blow their trumpets,
Let the mountains and the hills shout with all the trees in the forest.
Today is the great feast of Passover in heaven,
And the earth celebrates Easter bathed in the blood of Christ.”

The Church liturgical tradition attests to such renewal and recreation because the Easter Vigil scripture readings starts with the book of Genesis, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” God not only forgives our sins through the sacrifice of His Son, but he also restores our relationship with the rest of his creation, damaged by our greed and exploitative relationship to the natural world. The environmental damage incurred because of human greed is threatening sustainability of life on earth. The Paschal Mystery helps us to look at our redemption holistically, creating life sustaining physical and spiritual ecology.

Happy Easter!