

On this joyful Easter-tide we drive away our sorrows and fears with the beautiful words of the Revelation to Saint John, chapter 19, verses 11 to 16. We read, "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS." This is the Word of God. Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Dear fellow heirs of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord,

This is the day of victory, the celebration of our great champion, Jesus! To fully appreciate that victory, let us first fully consider the enemy. Artist Albert Ryder created a memorable painting entitled "The Race Track." It hangs in Cleveland's Museum of Art. Its subtitle reads, "Death on a Pale Horse." The horseman is alone on the track and is wielding a huge scythe. On the ground alongside the track is a big snake. Perhaps the first thing you notice as you look at the picture is that the rider is going clockwise—the wrong way so he can pick off everyone else as they race toward the finish. We know that he will get every one. That pale rider, Death, is coming after all of us. He's got your friends and family in his sights. He's going to catch you and me. And he always wins. But today, that all changes.

Now let's go back to the picture from Revelation. The rider on a white horse is King of kings and Lord of lords. We might be a bit afraid of him because he seems threatening with blazing fire and a sharp sword and because he "treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty." But we notice his power. He is able to overcome all. He is victorious. He is the final image of the warrior we have been thinking about through all of Lent. Today we celebrate our Lord's victory over Satan and death. It is a day to celebrate his **victory!**

Our Savior is the greatest hero and warrior ever. But we last left him on Good Friday dead and buried. He had just declared, "It is finished," and then voluntarily given up his life. How can he be victorious if he is dead? **Our hero is not dead, but alive, because he defeated death.** Look again: "I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war." This rider is not a statue. He is alive and powerful, and he is actively at war—with the host of heaven following him. We know who this is: Jesus! What a grand picture of him! He is no longer a captive humiliated by soldiers, beaten and whipped. His head is not bowed. His body is not in a grave. "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead".

That's what Easter is all about! Victory! Death has actually been conquered! Jesus had certainly died. The soldiers stabbed him in the heart to make sure of it. His body was then placed in a grave and sealed tight. The blood that Jesus shed cleanses us from sin, not just ours but the sins of the entire world. That victory was clear when Jesus said, "It is finished"!

Yet "The last enemy to be destroyed is death". Jesus' empty tomb makes it clear that he is more powerful than death. He has victory even over that last enemy. Jesus let death grab hold of him, just as he permitted the soldiers to take him away in the garden. He volunteered to die. Every lamb that had been sacrificed on Jewish altars for the previous 1,400 years had foreshadowed, promised, and predicted the death of the Lamb of God. The God-man, Jesus, paid the penalty as the perfect, law-keeping human and as true God, to make the perfect sacrifice to cover the sin and guilt of the entire world. But Jesus did something else no one else has ever done. He killed death! He arose, stronger than the grave! Jesus is alive! The mighty rider on the white horse has the victory!

Let there be no doubt. The Bible lists over a dozen different appearances of the risen Jesus, including one time when there were five hundred people present. Most of the gospel accounts, including St. Paul's account of the resurrection, were written during the lifetime of thousands of people who were alive at the time of the first Easter. If it were not true, they would have said so and written so. Then Christianity would have become just another fairy tale. If it had not happened, you would have expected books written by the Jewish leaders and the Romans that would have refuted the gospel accounts. But so many knew either from personal experience or from what they heard directly from people who had experienced it firsthand. Jesus actually rose miraculously from the grave.

How important that is to all of us. You know death is coming for you too, don't you? We try our best to push it away. We spend more than a trillion dollars a year in the United States alone to try to treat different threats to life. We just can't stop it. Medically, death arrives when the heart stops and the brain waves cease. There is no cure but one!

The empty tomb of Jesus proves his words about death are true: "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die". That's you and me. We will rise because the one who has conquered death said so. We must close our eyes in death, just as Jesus did, and fall asleep only to rise glorious. We must put off the mortal, perishable bodies and rise as St. Paul tells us: "In a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality." The apostle's words bring us back to our victorious Lord riding the white horse. He has the power to do as he promised. **Our living hero has all authority on the day of judgment.**

"His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

If you ever thought Jesus was too weak to take on tough enemies, realize that this is the last picture of Jesus that we have in the Bible. There are references to the great white throne and Jesus on that throne amidst the beautiful, final picture of heaven, but this is the image God wants on our brain. Why? The awesome power of Jesus is portrayed with the sharp sword and the iron scepter, as he carries out the fury of the Father. Notice his robe is “dipped in blood.” When you heard that, you probably thought that it was a reference to his own blood, shed on the cross. But the reference to “tread[ing] the winepress” of God’s fury helps us to understand that this is the blood of his enemies. The Old Testament prophet Isaiah says about Jesus: “Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress?” The one robed in splendor proclaimed, “I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing”.

Sure and certain judgment will come to Satan and all the rebellious host of hell. They have worked against the Lord of lords and King of kings. They were the first who rebelled against him. But those who refused his gifts and have mocked our Savior and his people will also be judged. As the psalmist wrote long ago, those who “band together against the Lord and against his anointed” will be judged by the one pictured here as riding the white horse. He will “break them with a rod of iron” and “dash them to pieces like pottery”. Here in this imagery, we have Easter and judgment day holding hands . . . with only an instant between them. Yet we know that . . . **those with the rider are safe forever. Alleluia!**

We are believers, heirs of heaven, children of God by his grace. We will rise from death and join the hosts of heaven in praise of our gracious Lord. In heaven, every voice—angels or human—will join in giving praise to the rider on the white horse who has used his power for us! He has cleansed us with his blood and covered us with his righteousness. To our heavenly Father, we look just like Jesus! See how much he loves us!

At the moment of our death, the fear will be gone. The ugliness will be gone. The guilt and sin from the past are already gone. The hopelessness, the wondering—those last minutes before our souls leave this body will change from thoughts focused on this life to inexpressible joy. The splendid and beautiful land of heaven will explode into view! Our souls will come into the welcome presence of this victorious warrior who is Lord of lords and King of kings. When he comes again in glory on the clouds of heaven, he will raise us from our graves. We will have perfect, eternal bodies. There will be love and peace and joy forevermore. Here’s the picture God gives us at the end of the Bible: “They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away”. And it’s all because of the resurrection of our Lord from the dead we celebrate today. This is the feast of victory for our God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.