

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

***"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures"*** (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

*Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*

May I ask you: how would you describe what is of "first importance" in your life?

Could it be something that would be the foundation for your life? You could describe what is "first importance" as something that is the core or basis for who you are and what you do. Something that is described as "first importance" is something that you would not be able to live without. So, what is it? What provides the reason to live? What is of "first importance" in your life?

In today's Epistle text, St. Paul actually answers this question of "first importance" for us. So, how does Paul answer this most-important question? He says, of "first importance" is Jesus. Jesus, who ***"died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures"*** (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

Jesus is of "first importance" and the Scriptures prove it. This is why St. Paul writes ***"in accordance with the Scriptures"*** twice. He is repeating this phrase to emphasize that this is not a new thing. There is no contradiction. This is not made up. This was prophesied of and fulfilled in Jesus the Christ.

You see, the Old Testament clearly predicted the Messiah's death, burial, and bodily resurrection. Jesus, too, spoke to the unbelieving Jews who asked Him for a sign of His Messiahship saying, ***"An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"*** (Matthew 12:39-40). Here, Jesus is referring to His bodily resurrection as the ultimate sign of His Messiahship.

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But what else could St. Paul had been referring to ***“in accordance with the Scriptures”***?

God tested the faithfulness of Abraham as He led him on the way to sacrifice his only beloved son Isaac. As Isaac questioned where the lamb was for this burnt offering, Abraham said to his son Isaac: ***“God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son”*** (Genesis 22:8). Yahweh saw that Abraham was faithful to God, so before he would sacrifice his son, God spoke: ***“Abraham, Abraham! Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me”*** (Genesis 22:11, 12). And behold, there was a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. So, ***“Abraham called the name of that place, ‘The LORD will provide’; as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided’”*** (Genesis 22:14). God provided the substitute.

The Psalmist David foretold of the death of the Messiah. ***“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”*** (Psalm 22:1a) ***“Yet You are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In You our fathers trusted; they trusted, and You delivered them. To You they cried and were rescued; in You they trusted and were not put to shame”*** (Psalm 22:3-5). ***“For dogs encompass Me; a company of evildoers encircles Me; they have pierced My hands and feet”*** (Psalm 22:16).

The Prophet Isaiah also foretold the death of the Messiah. ***“Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed”*** (Isaiah 53:4-5).

Isaiah also spoke of the burial of the Messiah: ***“And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth”*** (Isaiah 53:9). Jesus is the suffering servant, who intercedes for transgressors! By His wounds, we are healed!

But the Messiah would not remain dead. The Prophet Hosea foretold the bodily resurrection of the Messiah. He wrote: ***“After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before Him”*** (Hosea 6:2).

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Over and over again, either directly or indirectly, literally, or in figures of speech, the Old Testament foretold of the Messiah's death, burial, and resurrection. No one who believed and understood the Scriptures should have been surprised that the promised Messiah was ordained to die, be buried, and then bodily resurrected.

This is of so much importance that this "first importance" is also included in the Creeds. In the Nicene Creed, we confess that "*[Jesus] suffered and was buried. And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures.*"

Christ's suffering, death, and bodily resurrection is of "first importance." Jesus' suffering, death, and bodily resurrection fulfilled the Scriptures!

But for our fallen world, it doesn't find much importance in the suffering, death, and bodily resurrection of the Messiah. And to be honest, there are many days, when we, who are Christian, followers of Christ, do not think about Jesus, let alone have Him as most important in our lives. What is most important: the Easter chocolates and candies or Jesus? What have you thought more of on this Resurrection of Our Lord's Day?

To top it off, too many Christians these days believe they can usher in the return of Christ. "***But,***" Christ says, "***concerning that day and hour no one knows.***" (Matthew 24:36). And many say if we only bless a certain country, we will be blessed. And if we don't bless that country, we will be cursed. The problem is, where is Jesus? Who is of "first importance"? Jesus is the blessing. Christians are blessed in Jesus! All who trust in Jesus are saved by His blood and His merit! There is nothing more to do regarding salvation. All we can do is to trust and cling to Jesus, who is "***the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God***" (Hebrews 12:2).

So, is the Resurrection of Our Lord just another day for you? Or is it of "first importance"?

Again, St. Paul called this day as the day of "first importance." He tells how the resurrected Messiah appeared to Peter, James, then to the other apostles, and lastly to him. But even as a previous persecutor of the church of God, the resurrected Jesus appeared to Paul to forgive his sins and to make him a great apostle.

Jesus suffered, died and rose to fulfill all of God the Father's promises in Scripture. He suffered, died and rose to forgive the sins of the unrighteous, to make you and I righteous by His grace through faith in Him.

So, here we are on this day. We are here to celebrate what is of "first importance." Yes, today is Easter, but we celebrate mini-Easters each Sunday morning and Monday evening as we receive the fruits of His cross: forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation in His Means of Grace – His Word and His Sacrament.

When we examine ourselves seriously, we recognize that we are sinners. So, we see the need of the Savior. Our only hope is in Jesus. This is why we come to this place as we receive His grace week in and week out.

After all, if Christ has not been raised, nothing else matters. If Christ has been raised, nothing else matters. This suffering, death and bodily resurrection of Jesus is of "first importance."

Because Jesus died, the penalty for yours and my sins have been paid. Through Christ's shed blood, we are redeemed! Because Jesus rose, never to die again, we are heirs of His resurrection! Through faith in Christ Jesus your new life has begun. Jesus is of "first importance."

*Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Amen.*

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**