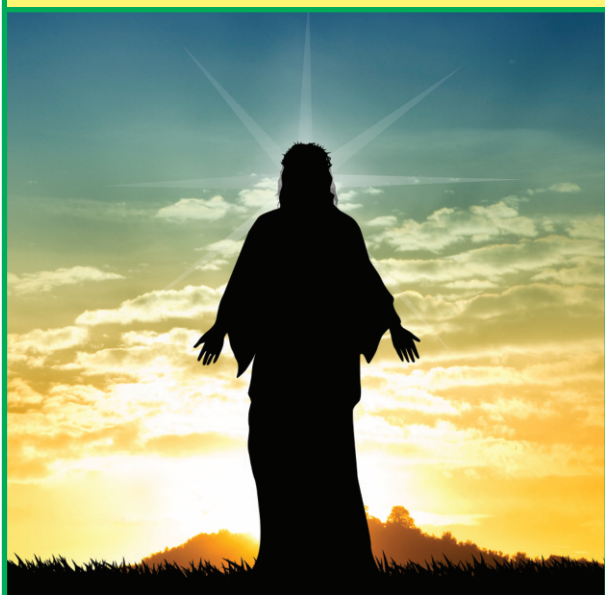


Finding Hope in Christ's Resurrection



Christopher News Notes

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By His great mercy He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

—1 Peter 1:37

DEATH AND GRIEF ARE INEVITABLE PARTS OF ALL OUR LIVES. But Christian hope is grounded in the resurrection of Jesus and the belief that we will be reunited with our loved ones in the joy of heaven some day.

Until then, we can find guidance on how best to deal with life's most difficult moments in the words of Scripture and the example of Christ's followers in this world.

Food for the Journey

For Catholics, receiving the Eucharist is a foretaste of heaven because it allows us to be in "holy communion" with the resurrected Jesus. This stems from the belief that the priest can supernaturally transform the host into "the real presence of Christ," though it still maintains the physical appearance of bread. The Eucharist, then, can serve as a form of spiritual healing for those who wish to become more Christlike themselves.

For Dr. Wes Ely, a physician based in Nashville, Tennessee, the spiritual lives of his patients are just as important as their physical health. In his work in the Intensive Care Unit at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, he asks all those he cares for about their spiritual values. Whether they are atheists or believers from any religious tradition, he responds to their requests for help through their struggles and, in some cases, he prepares them to face the end of their lives.

As he recalled during a *Christopher Closeup* interview about his Christopher Award-winning book *Every Deep-Drawn Breath*, there was one patient in critical condition for whom Dr. Ely's Catholic faith played a role. His name was Gian, and he was a doctor who had contracted COVID during the pandemic's early days. During one visit, Dr. Ely asked Gian, "What matters to you?" Gian responded, "The Eucharist."

Since Dr. Ely is a Eucharistic Minister, he was able to bring Gian Holy Communion the next day. Gian began crying afterwards, saying, "This is the most important thing I could ever want."

Dr. Ely said, "As physicians, Gian and I incorporate science into faith, acknowledging that when we ingest the Eucharist, it enters the workings of the cells of our entire body. My faith affirms that consuming the Eucharist helps me become a better

How High is Heaven?

ABC News anchor and Christopher Award-winning author Linsey Davis is devoted to her Christian faith. So, when her five-year-old son, Ayden, asked why he only had two grandparents (Linsey's mom and dad), she explained that her husband's mother died when he was a toddler and now lives in heaven. Ayden declared, "I want to go see her in heaven!"

Linsey explained they couldn't do that, then thought his interest in the topic would go away. But when they were on a plane together, Ayden kept looking out the window, hoping to see his grandmother in heaven. Linsey realized that this might be a common issue for parents, so she turned it into the children's book *How High is Heaven*.

During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Linsey said, "It's a whimsical look at one little boy's path in trying to see his grandmother again. Can he take a hot air balloon or a pogo stick or a trampoline or a spaceship [to heaven]? Then, [he realizes,] ultimately...that's not how you get to heaven...The one thing that comforted my son was the idea of a reunion, that he would see [his grandmother] again, and that this was not goodbye, but see you later."

servant of God and others, and I readily admit that I need all the help I can get. I believe that how we handle ourselves on earth will echo into eternity, and the Eucharist is both our shield and protection during life—and our Viaticum, food for the journey, in dying. For Gian, the knowledge that this might be the last time he received the Eucharist—and it was—transformed the moment for him, transforming him beyond the sterile walls of the ICU to a place where he felt safe, loved, and in an eternal relationship with God."

All of us are in an eternal relationship with God, so we can find hope in the gift of the Eucharist that Jesus left us to take part in His death and resurrection—and as a way to look forward to the heavenly kingdom we all hope to reach. May we take advantage of this "food for the journey" in good times and bad.

Lifted in Eternal Life with God

Many people, even non-Christians, are aware of the story of Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection from the dead, as told in the gospels. But for Christians, our faith in this historic event takes the suffering we endure over the course of our earthly lives and redeems it in a way that affects our eternal lives.

Author and theologian Henri Nouwen offers these thoughts: "The resurrection of Jesus is the basis of our faith in the resurrection of our bodies...Our bodies, as Paul says, are temples of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 6:19) and, therefore, sacred. The resurrection of the body means that what we have lived in the body will not go to waste, but will be lifted in our eternal life with God. As Christ bears the marks of His suffering in His risen body, our bodies in the resurrection will bear the marks of our suffering. Our wounds will become signs of glory in the resurrection."

Nouwen takes this meditation on Jesus and develops it even further: "The resurrection is the expression of God's faithfulness to Jesus and to all God's children. Through the resurrection, God has said to Jesus, 'You are indeed My beloved Son, and My love is everlasting,' and to us God has said, 'You indeed are My beloved children, and My love is everlasting.'"

"The resurrection," he continues, "is God's way of revealing to us that nothing that belongs to God will ever go to waste. What belongs to God will never get lost—not even our mortal bodies. The resurrection doesn't answer any of our curious questions about life after death, such as: How will

it be? How will it look? But it does reveal to us that, indeed, love is stronger than death.”

Even in Darkness, God is Here

“This is indeed the will of My Father, that all who see the Son and believe in Him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.”—John 6:40

Laura Sobiech endured the worst pain a parent can experience: the loss of a child. She walked through her son Zach’s osteosarcoma battle with him until he died at age 18 in 2013. Laura also marveled at the strength, grace, and love with which he conducted himself through the entire ordeal, thanks largely to the depth of his faith and the support of his loved ones.

Zach’s cancer diagnosis at age 14 was a shock to the whole family, but he responded to it with a maturity beyond his years. During a *Christopher Closeup* interview, Laura said, “I think the unique part of our very Catholic story was that we got to see God’s economy with suffering and grace rise above the surface...Zach saw this, too. When we give our suffering over to God and allow Him to use it as a channel of grace into the world, He can touch lives, He can change lives.”

Laura continued, “[Zach also] relied on the sacraments. We would have our parish priest over for the anointing, and especially at the end, when Zach couldn’t even sit up on the couch, he would just lay there with his eyes closed and raise his hands for the anointing. He understood the

power of those sacraments.”

Zach came to national attention when the song *Clouds*, which he wrote and recorded, became a hit. Its lyrics were his way of expressing his heart to those he loved. Laura shared Zach’s story in her memoir, *Clouds*, as well as in the Christopher Award-winning Disney Plus movie of the same name. Though both works include a good deal of sadness, they also convey joy.

Laura observed, “There is no joy like that which is experienced in the midst of intense suffering... Reflecting back on it, joy isn’t so much about the laughter that happens...It’s about having those intense moments of contentment and gratitude in the midst of suffering, which [reminds us that] even in this darkness, God is here.”

Laura’s own faith in the resurrection of Jesus, and what it means for our eternal life, continues to bring her comfort. She concluded, “I’m [Zach’s] mom, so I pray for his soul. But then I also talk to him and ask him to intercede for me. I try to hit both ends there...But as we look back, it’s incredible to us that he did somehow bring peace to us, even though he was the one that was having to let go and struggle so much.

“There’s always going to be this space where Zach is, and...I never want to get to the point where some tears aren’t shed because, again, it’s my love for him that brings that to the surface. I can’t see him now. I look forward to seeing him again. That’s my hope: I will get to see him again.”


**“It’s better to light one candle
than to curse the darkness.”**

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“If Christ is risen, we can look with renewed eyes and hearts on each event in our lives, even the most negative. The moments of darkness, failure and even sin can be transformed and herald a new path forward. When we have reached the bottom of our misery and weakness, the risen Christ gives us the strength to rise again. If we entrust ourselves to Him, His grace saves us. The crucified and risen Lord is the full revelation of mercy, present and at work in history.”

—Pope Francis