

## Explaining the Crucifixion and Resurrection

Rev. J. Clark Echols Jr.

Easter is a time of great rejoicing. Jesus Christ rose and left the empty tomb, giving testimony that God is Human. Children are most impressed by the Easter morning story, and parents should capitalize upon it. From their earliest years, children can be impressed with the person of their Lord. He walked the earth. He taught men by His words and actions. He cured them of their diseases. He died, but He rose up from death to be above heaven as our Lord. He really lived as a man, we can assure our children, and He is a man still.

When we make this emphasis, however, we cannot leave out the story of Jesus' death. To complete the story of the resurrection we must include the crucifixion. The question is, how do we deal with the horror of it, and what effect does that story have on our children? It is not a beautiful story, and perhaps we would rather skip it when teaching our children. It seems to be a subject more appropriate for adults, as it spurs our reflection and repentance. What positive results could be had for our children by reviewing what must be the depth of mankind's evil? On the other hand, the glory and the power of the resurrection could be missed if the crucifixion is not understood.

One of the wonderful new teachings of the New Church is the purpose and necessity of the crucifixion. Simply put, as we would put it to our children, the crucifixion was the last and worst battle Jesus had to fight. He was fighting the hells His whole life. He had to overpower them with the truth, and cast them back into hell. During His fight on the cross He had to struggle to remain conscious of the Divinity within Himself. He had to struggle to remain steadfast in His desire to save men according to the Divine plan—the only plan that could work. Jesus had to glorify Himself, that is, join the Father in heaven. So He could not give in to men's materialistic desires for a kingdom on earth. Jesus had to always remember that what He did *would* lead to the salvation of men. This was what His struggle was all about. On the cross, the man Jesus came to despair of ever being able to accomplish His task.

Our children can easily imagine Jesus giving up when we point out all that happened to Him. The Jews had rejected Him as their leader. The Romans, who ruled the land, did not protect Him, but jeered at Him. And finally, the multitude demanded His crucifixion. He could, we can imagine, have miraculously saved all men. But He did not, for that would have destroyed men's freedom, and thus their humanity. He did not give up, either. He won the temptation by calling upon the power of the Divine within Himself. He never gave up His desire to save all men.

The Christian Church today emphasizes the crucifixion. It is believed that Jesus made the final sacrifice and that we are now washed clean by His blood. The New Church has a different emphasis because we have been told what was spiritually happening at the time. I believe that our children can understand something of the spiritual process. They can be given a visible God to worship. They can certainly understand the external aspects of what was happening during the crucifixion. They can see the Lord's temptation to miraculously come down off the cross. They can see that He didn't stop the train of events that led to His crucifixion. Indeed, He allowed Himself to be crucified.

Experience has shown that the violence found in the Word does not upset our children unduly. We need not avoid the story for that reason. In fact, we can show them, from the great new doctrines we have, that the crucifixion was but one step in the Lord's work to save all men. We must impress our children with the fact that the Lord knew that what He was doing was more important than physical life, the life of His body. Here, we can appeal to the child's own experience. Most children have had to make an agonizing decision (even if it was merely natural). Jesus agonized in His temptation because He began to doubt that He could save mankind. He had to fight off the idea that His physical life was the only life He had. He won the battle because He turned to the Divine power within Himself and it sustained Him. This can be likened to how our children turn to us and to the Word.

This spiritual view of the crucifixion leads beautifully and powerfully into the Easter story. With this background, we can give our children a real picture of their God. He was a man. He was subject to all physical laws. He felt hunger, tiredness, and pain. His body could die! *But*, wonders of wonders, He still had a body! We can picture Him in our minds. He is thus made real for our children. Perhaps they do not understand the glorification. They *can* understand that He does not now walk on the earth, but rules from above heaven. He rose from the tomb, leaving nothing behind. Because they know that the Lord's body died on the cross, our children will realize that He took that body with Him to heaven so that they can now picture Him in their thoughts. (Older children may understand that He glorified that body, and so made it Divine.)

It is vitally important to establish the reality and humanity of God in the minds of our children. The crucifixion story certainly adds to this idea. Of course it is not the end of the story, and most of our teaching and energy should be devoted to the Easter morning resurrection. Yet the lead we make up to it will enhance the wonder of it all. If we have in our minds God's Humanity; if we remember how horrible evil can be; if we learn the lesson that We have the freedom to accept (or reject) our God; all these things will make our worship that much more meaningful. In fact, by knowing about the crucifixion *and* how it led to the resurrection, our worship is that much more uplifting.

Once we have taught our children about what happened to the Lord and what He did during the crucifixion, we have prepared them to understand the resurrection. The body of Jesus died. What is merely physical cannot exist in the spiritual world. Yet we know He lived for He miraculously took His body with Him. By this He showed us that there is a life after death, and He showed us that He is God. We can explain this to our children. The Lord performed a miracle so that we can think of Him and be thinking about our God.

So let us not be afraid of sharing these stories with our children. There are simple examples and comparisons they can understand that will give them an idea of what happened. Emphasize that all that Jesus did and all that happened to Him was done in Providence, leading to His defeat of the hells, the glorification of His Human, and the salvation of us all. If we begin to plant this special New Church idea in the minds of our children now, they will be given affections for it by the Lord. They will be able to draw on these remains as adults, and be confirmed in the particular truths involved. And, importantly, through it all they will have a living, real picture of their God—the Lord Jesus Christ.