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April 24, 2011: Why the Resurrection Changes Everything

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Title: Why the Resurrection Changes Everything

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4/24/2011—Happy Easter. The tomb is empty. He is risen. We have a phrase in America. We say that some new thing “changes everything”. But it is never true. No event changes everything because the human condition remains fundamentally the same. But if the words used to describe the resurrection were accurate, they really would change everything. Pope Benedict’s wonderful book, the second volume of *Jesus of Nazareth*, subtitled, *From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection*, makes it clear that for the nascent Church, the resurrection was not an apparition, a dream, or a symbol. People met the risen Christ. It really was Jesus. But Jesus was not a resurrected corpse like Lazarus, destined finally to die a biological death. Jesus was living a new existence, the new existence promised to all of us when Christ, who is with us always, “returns”. Since Christians do not understand the resurrection, in part because we cannot understand what this new existence is like, Benedict calls it—with hesitation—an evolutionary leap (he also calls it, with more confidence, an “ontological leap” but this will not mean as much to people perhaps). He means that resurrection life is like our current historical life only to an extent. We will become like a new species. This is why Jesus can, on the one hand, eat a piece of fish and, on the other, appear and disappear in a fashion that causes his friends not to recognize him. Benedict spends much time on the attitude of the Christian to the future because, since Jesus ascends to the right hand of the father, one could think of Jesus as now in heaven and one day returning. But Benedict says that all that really matters to the Christian is the present. Jesus is present with us now. He is not in some other place. He is with God. But “God is not in one space alongside other spaces. God is God—he is the premise and the ground of all the space there is, but he himself is not part of it. ... ‘Sitting at God’s right hand’ means participating in this divine domination over space.” (283). So we see that for the Christian, the reign of space/time is at an end. Benedict presents a beautiful message. I wish I could believe it. But don’t imagine that anything in any way less than this concrete and realistic portrayal of power is genuine Christianity.