

HE IS RISEN! HE IS ALIVE! HE IS WITH US!

About a year before Jesus was arrested, condemned and then hung on a cross, he told his disciples that just as Jonah was in the belly of a whale for three days and nights, so the Son of Man will be three days in the earth and then will rise from the earth. At the time the disciples and especially the Apostles simply did not know what this meant. It simply did not compute in their minds. All through scripture there were many instances of prophets performing various miracles, but not once do the Scriptures speak of anyone rising from the dead of their own accord. Yet this was what Jesus was now saying would happen to him. No doubt the Apostles simply believed that sooner or later, Jesus would explain it all to them. In no way were they going to leave him for they firmly and totally believed in him and would never desert him.

But consider what Jesus was really saying. He was pointing to his resurrection from the dead as the ultimate proof that everything he said and taught was absolutely true and everything he claimed to be, especially that he was equal to God and was the Messiah, was absolutely true. All these claims were made several times, but they were also claims which were difficult to take literally and to be true. They did demand faith in him and the Apostles certainly had that, yet being human, they also wanted to be absolutely sure. So much was happening in their lives from the time Jesus called them to follow him to the time of his death that it was a bit overwhelming.

Now it is the Sunday after the horrific two days beginning with the arrest of Jesus and then his crucifixion and burial in a tomb outside Jerusalem. So much had happened that it would take a long time for it all to really sink in and for all of them to come to grips with the reality. No doubt they remembered the numerous times that Jesus referred to his upcoming arrest and death. And no doubt they remembered that each time Christ talked about this, he always added that he would rise from the dead. However this simply was beyond understanding for the Apostles and they never once really asked him to explain it.

So on this Sunday morning after the great Sabbath they were all gathered in that upper room where they had just a few days earlier had the Passover dinner. The sun was just beginning to rise when there was an insistent pounding on the locked door and when they opened it there were several women claiming that the tomb of Jesus was empty! How could this be? Immediately Peter and John dashed from the room and began to run to the tomb to see for themselves what was happening. John, being younger than Peter outran him but when he reached the tomb he looked in but waited for Peter to come who then immediately went in to see for himself and verify that indeed Jesus was not there. Then John went in, saw the burial cloths neatly folded and he says in his Gospel, "He saw and believed!" Peter was simply confused and the idea of Jesus rising from the dead did not enter his mind.

It was a little time later when all the Apostles were again together in the upper room, Thomas being the only one absent, that suddenly there was Jesus, in the flesh, standing there. Now they could all see him and hear him talking to them, and still they had a difficult time really believing that it was truly him, truly alive, truly standing there looking perfectly healthy and well. Jesus then asked them to touch him, to feel him. "Ghosts do not have flesh and bones" he told them and no doubt they were all touching and feeling him, and still they were not

totally convinced. Jesus then asked them if they had anything to eat and they gave him a bit of food which he ate. Again he told them that "ghosts do not eat." Even then their doubts remained.

The disbelief of the Apostles is perhaps the best proof we have that Jesus really did rise from the dead. Such an event is difficult to comprehend, and if those who were eye witnesses had such a difficult time believing, it makes it all the more plausible that the resurrection of Jesus was indeed true. Today, twenty centuries later, the resurrection is still an event which boggles the mind. But once one believes it, then everything else about Jesus reported in the Gospels and all the teachings of the prophets, especially Isaiah in the Old Testament, falls into place. Thus, today it is our faith which helps us to believe and then to begin to comprehend that everything Christ taught is absolutely true. And once one accepts that it then follows that the Church he founded, the Catholic Church with the Pope as a successor of Peter and the Bishops as successors of the Apostles is also the true Church of Christ, of God.

But there is even more at stake with our belief in the resurrection. Christ proclaimed, and his Apostle Paul proclaimed even more, the deep significance of this event. Through faith our lives can be changed and we can become more and more true followers of Christ in the way we live, work and play, proclaiming through our actions what it really means to be a follower of Christ and a true Christian. In a word, living what we believe! Now add to this the belief that we too will one day rise from the dead just as Jesus has done! We were created human beings with flesh and bones and we are destined to rise one day from the dead to be true human beings for all eternity! Just what that all means in reality is really beyond our comprehension in this life, but it does lead to a very genuine hope that one day it will all happen. Just imagine what that means! Let your imagination run wild; it will only be a glimpse through fog, but it will be wonderful beyond anything we could ever imagine. That is our destiny! That is what God and his Son Jesus has promised us. That is what the original plan of God in His Creation of the universe so long ago is all about.

Today we all live in time. Tomorrow we will all live in eternity. Time we know often moves slowly and every once in a while seems to fly. Part of being human means that we are all prone to be impatient not just sometimes but quite often. To imagine what eternity will be like is beyond our capability to even begin to have any realization of what it will be like. Yet that is our destiny. That is our faith. And today as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord, it is a wonderful time to renew our faith in Christ and in all he has taught us in word and in deed. And it is also a wonderful time to renew our commitment to Him in our daily lives, whether at home, at play or at work.

Faith! The climate of the world at present is anything but hopeful. Not just our country, but all countries large or small are suffering from the financial melt-down affecting absolutely everyone in one way or another. The evening news almost never has happy reporting on financial matters and each half-hour news leaves one somewhat depressed. But today we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is a foretaste of our ultimate goal. Our life on this planet is limited, but with faith in Christ, in God, in each other we can get through it. Keeping God a real part of our lives assures us of success, real success! That is the promise of God, of Christ. It will most likely not be the way we plan, but then God always knows what is best. Trust him! Trust Christ. He is alive! He is with us today. Alleluia

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