

St. Leo The Great

ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

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*Christ
is
Risen!*



HE IS RISEN!



For good reason we Christians never simply say that Jesus rose, for that would sound as though it were only in the past tense. It is not in the past tense that Jesus came back to life from the dead but in the present tense as well so that we can rightly say Jesus IS Risen in the present tense. The Church can and must celebrate Easter for the profound reason that He is alive and not only lives but lives among us, in us.

For the Romans, Jesus' Resurrection would have to be a body that was stolen by one of His followers to keep the movement going and His memory alive which would spurn them on. Seeing is believing, therefore, having seen Jesus crucified at their own hands and seeing the moment when He breathed His last, they were the living witnesses to the fact that this threat to Rome, this affront to the religious sensibilities of the Pharisees, was put to death, end of story. It's just that the body is missing and this could lead to all kinds of speculations and rumours and supposedly false beliefs.

For Jesus' own disciples, we see in the Gospel accounts that one by one and in small groups they were filled with grief but abandoning any hopes they had placed in Jesus their friend. Sure, they had heard Him speak of rising from the dead many times, but their ears were deaf to it. His talk of a Kingdom only led them to think all the more of an earthly kingdom they would be most certainly privy to since they knew Jesus so well. Membership in Jesus' band would have its rewards and privileges. But now, he has been put to death and this chapter of their lives not only appears to be over but has filled them with regret that they had lived the past three years in what was obviously now, pointless. What good was following Jesus and leaving everything behind if He were to too early succumb to having been accused and crucified. They knew that Jesus was innocent but it would make little difference now when everything was painted with the brush of defeat.

We hear in the voice of one of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, the hope that they had in Jesus which was now all in the past in the very words, "... *but we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel.*" (Luke 23:21) It was an earthly hope about earthly things concerning a Messiah they thought would merely achieve earthly victories. So, no wonder their deep sense of lost hope. Their very footsteps were taking them away from Jesus and all He had promised.

But this was also the time when Christ had already risen from the dead and was appearing one-by-one to His disciples, his closest friends like Mary Magdalen and even to groups of those huddled in fear together after seeing Jesus' horrible death. At first, none of them recognized Him because His body was now a glorified body. There obviously had to have been no resemblance of Jesus for them to, even for a second, think that the 'stranger' they were meeting was their dear friend, let alone the Messiah.

Once those who knew Jesus before His death encountered Him alive again and once this inconceivable idea had settled in their hears, their lost hope was rediscovered, renewed and restored, except that it was a hope in Jesus Himself who would reveal a new perspective to their sense of Him and what He had won for them and all the world. They would now have an insight into their place in a different Kingdom that was not of the earth but heaven.

THE BATTLE CONTINUES

In talking with elementary school children about the scriptures and its well-known stories, I have asked about the great battle that took place in heaven. All, if not most, of the children know the story and the two sides in the battle: St. Michael the Archangel and the Devil. Everyone also seems to know which side one the battle – God's side, and that the Devil as a result of his defeat was cast out of heaven. Yet when you ask where Satan landed, it's amazing how most children (and adults too) get this wrong. The most popular answer is that the Devil was cast into hell, likely because that's where we think he belongs. The Devil wasn't cast into hell but actually down to the earth. He is here.

The Devil has been on the earth ever since the great heavenly battle was waged and he was miserably defeated. And from that time, on the earth, he has roamed about not doing mischief, as some might naively say, but perpetuating evil through careless and even willing hearts and souls. He must have most certainly ramped things up when Jesus was born as his greatest and eternal threat was now about to walk the earth he considered his own since it had been 'given' to him. He said as much to Jesus when, in the second temptation the Devil took Jesus to a high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the earth, saying, "*To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been*

given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” (Luke 4:6-7)

Satan is most effective and is given free reign especially when we deny his existence let alone consider that he is here on the earth. Yet, to the Christian, the true and close follower of Jesus, we can see, hear and even smell the presence of “Dirty Face”.

When those who stand for life and support the life and dignity of a mother and her baby, participate in a peaceful march to give witness to this defense of life in all its forms, you will see and hear so clearly the reality of Dirty Face. He will scream from the nasty, loud, cursing minority of fifty or sixty anti-life antagonists held to the side of the march by the police, the most vulgar things when they see a priest. They have no fear in the face of the overwhelming tens of thousands of people, most of them under the age of twenty-five, who quietly, amidst joyful chants from the youth that “we are a prolife generation” give witness to the presence and the will of God on the earth.

Way back when I was being ordained as a transitional Deacon shortly before ordination to the Priesthood, I remember the late Bishop Attila Miklosz who conferred the sacrament of ordination on us, say: “Gentlemen, don’t think that Jesus is calling you to redeem the world for He has already done that. What He is calling you to do is to make it known in the lives you live.” And that is true for us all who are baptized followers of the Risen Lord: to make Jesus known. That’s what all catechesis hopes to do; that’s what our NET Team and our endeavours into youth ministry are all about when they are “bringing youth to Christ”.

The fact that Jesus has Risen is a current and present truth means that the call, yes the overused word ‘call’, to you and me and for all the baptized is to live in the reality of the Risen Lord and make Jesus known. It is obvious that Jesus does not intend to convert hearts, minds and souls by appearing to them one by one as He did to His disciples after His Resurrection. After they saw Him alive and rejoiced in His presence with them again, He told them He was not going to stay among them in His bodily form but that He would send them a Helper, a Consoler, the Holy Spirit, who would lead them into all truth. Until they received this promised Holy Spirit they were effectively the loving but powerless friends of Jesus. It would only be after Jesus had left them and ascended and then sent the Holy Spirit, that they would be empowered to change the world, one soul, one group, one assembly, one nation at a time until it be done in every corner of the earth. And this mandate of the baptized continues.

First, however, catechesis is not the answer. People in the world today, like the apostles and disciples of Jesus themselves, have to first meet Jesus, experience Him, encounter Him in a moving and convincing way before they

can do what the disciples did as they learned of Jesus’ teachings, His ways and His great example. We can wonder why generations of Catholics don’t know a great deal about the faith and the scriptures, like knowing the Ten Commandments or the name and number of sacraments, etc., but we shouldn’t if they haven’t met Jesus or know Him personally. Our age, perhaps more than any other time because of the access to information at our fingertips, has at its fingertips a Church whose history is rife with examples of people who have experienced Christ and from that experience have done the incredible, the unimaginable, and the heroic as they gave living and sometimes even dying witness to the reality of Jesus.

I have been personally impacted by the statement we heard Bishop Christian Riesbeck make in his Lenten talk in our parish:

“If Jesus is the greatest gift the world has ever known, then the greatest gift we can give to another is to lead them to Jesus.”

The Risen Christ spurs us believers and followers to use the time in the lives we’ve been given to make Jesus known, but of course, we can’t do this unless we ourselves know Him, not like a character in a book but as the veritable God of all things, the Saviour and Messiah of the world, crucified, killed and alive again. We can’t effectively follow a memory or a character in a story but we can and must follow Him who is at the very center of life itself and of our own lives.

Jesus knew we couldn’t accomplish anything lasting on our own so He gave us the power, the energy, the wisdom and the knowledge to do it by the gift of the Holy Spirit. We can only live the life of Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit He sent, the same Spirit that hovered over the waters of Creation, called and moved through the prophets and made Jesus known before raising Jesus from death to life. Yet we have that same, yes, *same* Holy Spirit in us through Baptism and it can either be ignored or called forth to move us to do what millions of Christians have done before us in every age.



The time allotted to each of us between the gift from God of our birth and the time of our death is only known following the end of our earthly life and is found on every inscription in graveyards, cemeteries and mausoleums. It is not what Jesus the Risen Lord “left behind” but what He gives to us now and expects us to do in His name that makes all the difference in the space between these two realities. Someone once said, “Fear not that your life should come to an end. Fear rather that it will never have a beginning.” Our beginning and our end is found in the One who is the Beginning and the End of all things. Jesus. (FrC)



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