

# RCIA Newsletter - Keeping in Touch.

**No.5**

**23rd April 2020.**

**Dear Friends,**

This week we have a very 'meaty' newsletter for you - in that there is much to think about and take time over. We are in the season of Easter so our subject this week is, unsurprisingly, all about the Resurrection of Jesus and events following Easter Sunday. As well as notes from a talk about Miracles and the Resurrection, there is also a very full and prayerful meditation on what are called : "Stations of the Resurrection" - as a companion piece to the usual Stations of the Cross following the Passion and Death of Our Lord. I am very grateful to Caroline for this.

You can also follow Fr Tristan on the parish website where he is offering a series of talks over the next few weeks on Eastertide, up to the Ascension and Pentecost. So there is plenty for all of us on 'lockdown'!

God bless

John de Waal

## **Miracles and the Resurrection.**

"Space - the final frontier?" NO! DEATH is the final frontier.

The greatest miracle, from a Christian perspective, is the Incarnation - that is, God taking human nature (we believe that Jesus is the incarnate God - true God and true man). But after this the next greatest miracle is the Resurrection.

After the Incarnation all other miracles in the New Testament find their legitimacy.

*"For those who believe in God no explanation is necessary; for those who do not believe in God no explanation is possible." (St Thomas Aquinas)*

A miracle can be described as “*an interference with Nature by supernatural powers*” (C.S.Lewis) The Materialist only recognises the physical world - anything spiritual or non-material does not even come into their thinking. Some modern sceptics claim that ‘in olden times’ people were more gullible and accepted miracles because they didn’t understand the laws of Nature - not true! Note St Joseph’s reaction to the Virgin Birth. He knew exactly how babies are made. It was only later he accepted it as a miracle that is, a departure from Nature.

Also, let it be noted that the Catholic Church does not jump to conclusions when anyone claims a miracle. The bar is set very high. To be recognised as a miracle cure, for example, the cure has to be 1. instant/immediate; 2. permanent and 3. cannot be explained by any other, natural causes.

Let us now look at the Resurrection. I am going to consider three things :

1. What happened;
2. Why it is important; and
3. Let’s play Devil’s advocate and see what challenges the Resurrection has faced.

### **1. What happened?**

Part of the Creed states : “*on the third day he rose again from the dead*”. “*Men of Israel “ it says in the Acts of the Apostles,” Jesus of Nazareth ...you killed...But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death ...*” (Acts,2 : 22 - 25).

The first thing to note is that it is a very sober account. The Resurrection itself is not described. It was early Sunday morning, the Tomb was empty. What was the reaction? The body has been stolen!At first the Apostles are unconvinced by the women - it is significant that women are the first witnesses of the Resurrection. In Jewish culture at that time women were very much second-class citizens whose testimony was not trusted. They were not even allowed to give evidence in a court of law! Had the Resurrection been a put-up job women would not have been chosen as first witnesses. It is the Empty Tomb and subsequent appearances of Jesus that change the Apostles’ minds. Note the extreme scepticism of Thomas. It took a second appearance by Jesus in the Upper Room and Our Lord’s challenge to Thomas to actually touch the mark of the wounds which convinced ‘Doubting Thomas’.(St John, 20 : 24 - 28).

## 2. Why important?

What is at stake? The Christian Faith stands or falls with it. The Apostles made the physical Resurrection of Jesus the centre of their teaching in other words, it goes back to the very origin of Christianity.

On it our Redemption depends : *Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life* - including our sharing in the divine life (*"By the mystery of this water and wine ..."* prayer at the Offertory of the Mass).

*"As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive."* I Cor. 15 : 20 - 22.

OUR Resurrection depends on it ... *"if for this life only we have hoped in Christ we are of all men most to be pitied."* (I Corinthians 15 : 19).

***"Through the risen presence of Jesus we know our story will not end in empty silence."*** Gerald O'Collins SJ.

The Resurrection of Jesus points to a **transformation of reality**. Clearly Jesus is not a resuscitated corpse. He has very different abilities than we normally have - note the closed doors/ appears and disappears/ not immediately identifiable (Emmaus) - and yet human (asks for something to eat to prove this very point).

There is much mystery - which should be no surprise given the nature of what we are considering.

## 3. Challenges?

Some have tried to say the Resurrection didn't happen but can be explained by claiming that Jesus was not really dead at all , but fainted and later revived. Some say it was a matter of fraud or hallucination.

Some - even some Christians - try to avoid the miraculous nature of it by saying it can be explained by it being merely a subjective experience of the first Christians. So much of the answer to these challenges comes back to the question of the Empty Tomb. **This is the real test.**

Sceptics try to explain it away by claiming the body was stolen by :

**1. The Apostles; 2. Mary Magdalene; 3. Joseph of Arimathea; 4. The Jews.**

All can be shown as absurd. IF the body was still there or thereabouts it could be discovered and the Christian message would have been strangled at birth! Take the witnesses : the Women; the Apostles (who would die for a lie?); the two disciples on the road to Emmaus; 500; St Paul.

**Negative witnesses** : Jews and Romans. It would have been in their best interest to uncover a fraud! They didn't or couldn't. The evidence of the Gospels/Epistles is rejected **only if** miracles are rejected as impossible.

**Conclusions:**

The Resurrection is Victory over Death; note the whole man - body and soul is raised, not just a disembodied spirit, a ghost;

*"Our mortal nature must be swallowed up in life."* 2 Cor. 5:4.

The Passion/Death, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus are all of a piece making sense of Jesus' purpose and destiny - and, therefore pointing to OUR purpose and destiny as well.

The Resurrection points to the unification of the body and soul - the detail is unclear. We will be the same person but somehow different - there is always an element of us which makes us "US". We will have glorified bodies as Jesus.

*"Matter will be once more the extension of spirit, not its limit."* (Christopher Dawson).

Much is unknown about this "*new heaven, new earth*".

*"Nature in its turn will be set free from the tyranny of corruption, to share in the glorious freedom of the children of God."* (St Paul, Letter to the Romans).

We hear much these days about "Fake News" - and many have tried to present Jesus' Resurrection in that very light.

But given all that we do know - and accept on faith - in the person of Jesus we can be sure that it is not fake news but very much "GOOD NEWS".

## **A hymn attributed to St Columba, 6thc.**

Alone with none but thee, my God,  
I journey on my way;  
What need I fear , when thou art near,  
O King of night and day?  
More safe am I within they hand,  
Than if a host did round me stand.

My destined time is fixed by thee,  
And death doth know his hour.  
Did warriors strong around me throng,  
Thou could not stay his power;  
No walls of stone can man defend  
When thou thy messenger dost send.

My life I yield to thy decree,  
And bow to thy control  
In peaceful calm, for from thine arm  
No power can wrest my soul.  
Could earthly omens e'er appal  
A man that heeds the heavenly call!

The child of God can fear no ill,  
His chosen dread no foe;  
We leave our fate , with thee and wait  
Thy bidding when to go,  
'Tis not from chance our comfort springs,  
Thou art our trust, O King of kings.