

Dear Friends,

It might have been expected that when Jesus rose from the dead he would have appeared to multitudes of people, incontrovertibly proving himself to be the Son of God. But Jesus had once resisted the temptation to win followers by the spectacular feat of jumping from the top of the Temple. Unbelieving people who saw him after his resurrection would not become true followers either. He might have generated amazement, a nine-day wonder, but not real followers. In one of his first sermons, St. Peter explained: “God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen, not by the whole people but only by certain witnesses God had chosen beforehand. Now we are those witnesses – we have eaten and drunk with him after his resurrection from the dead.”

On many occasions Jesus had told the disciples that he would be put to death and rise again. But what did that mean? What would it have meant to us? “Rise from the dead” Rise where? Rise how? What did he mean by “rise”? Bodies don’t come back to life. Did he mean coming back as a sport of ghost? Without the benefit of hindsight, how could anyone have understood what he meant? The first clue was when Mary Magdalene, Peter and John found the tomb to be empty; no body, with the grave clothes left behind. Tentatively they began to understand something of what he meant by “rising from the dead”. But where was he? Questions still hung in the air.

Soon they would see him, but the mystery remained. The first one to see him was Mary Magdalene. She hung around the empty tomb, and he appeared to her. But she did not realize it was Jesus; she mistook him for a gardener, until he spoke her name, “Mary.” On the evening of Easter Day, he appeared, apparently without opening the door, to the apostles gathered in the upper room, and showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. Clearly it was him. Later that same evening he joined two disciples who were on their way to Emmaus, but we’re told that “something prevented them from recognizing him.” But as he broke bread “their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

Statements like these in the Gospel seem to reflect a belief in the early Church that perceiving the risen Christ required more than eyes and ears. The appearances were mysterious, and not for all to see, but only “certain witnesses God had chosen beforehand” who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. It needed a supernatural gift of faith, not eyes alone, to see the risen Lord.

The real basis of the Christian faith lies not in the historical evidence, strong indeed though it is, that the tomb was empty and his body was not there. The real evidence of the resurrection should be sought in the fact that his disciples ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. The Jewish holy day, the Sabbath, is Saturday, the last day of the week. But because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week, Sunday, that became our holy day; and every Sunday, ever since, his followers have joined together for what they first called the “breaking of bread” and we call the Eucharist or Mass. Here we listen to his Word, are taught his ways and become one with him; but more than that, in the words of St. Thomas Aquinas, we can come and see him “with the eyes of faith” and to recognize him in the breaking of bread. Here in the Eucharist we worship and adore Christ’s presence, risen and in glory, which we perceive in faith.

Wish Y’all A Very Happy Easter!

Your friend in Jesus
Msgr. Zach