

EIGHT DAYS LATER

This Sunday is the octave day of Easter. Easter is the only feast in the Catholic Church which is celebrated totally for eight days. Christmas is celebrated for eight days, but several of those days are feasts of saints like John, the youngest of the Apostles who was most likely still at the end of his teens when Christ called him, and then of course the Holy Innocents, the children killed by King Herod trying to kill the new born Jesus. In contrast, during this Easter Octave the one element flowing through all the daily Masses is the fact that the Apostles consistently seemed to have a hard time believing that Jesus really truly rose from the Dead, this in spite of the fact that Jesus during the past year referred a number of times to the fact that he was going to be arrested, convicted, tortured and finally crucified where he would then die, giving his life to undo the sin of Adam and Eve and restore the human race to a genuine friendship with God. Each time Christ would say this, his Apostles simply did not understand how this could ever be possible and they were all afraid to ask Jesus. The whole concept was simply beyond their comprehension.

There is also another thread flowing through this octave celebration and that is the way Jesus was treating all those he appeared to. In every case he showed just how human, thoughtful and gracious he could be. When he appeared to Mary Magdalene, she simply rushed to him and gave him one of the biggest hugs recorded in the Scriptures. Jesus let her do this but then gently asked her to let him go, to give him some breathing space. Then there was the account of the two disciples traveling to Emmaus when Jesus met up with them but who somehow changed his appearance so that they did not recognize him. After asking them what they were talking about, they were astounded that he must be the only person in Jerusalem who didn't know what had happened these past couple of days to a man named Jesus. The stranger asked what things? They recounted to him everything they knew. With that the stranger very simply began to tell them how all this had been predicted in the Scriptures, and he went on to give numerous examples and quotes. This was in itself extraordinary and one cannot help but wish that that conversation had been recorded. The two disciples were simply blown away as they listened and their hearts within them were pounding. Yet they simply didn't have a clue as to who this stranger might actually be. As they neared their destination, they begged the stranger to join them for supper which he did, but then as they began the meal he opened their eyes and they suddenly recognized him. Then with a silent poof he was gone! The two disciples sat there for a moment and as one they both jumped up and almost literally ran back the distance to Jerusalem where they found the Apostles and almost shouted that they had seen the Lord! Apparently the Apostles reaction was disbelief and a rising confusion and a fear of the unknown. Just what was going on?

One thing that is not recorded in any of the scriptures is the fact that I believe, namely that the first person Christ came to tell of his resurrection was his mother. This just makes absolute sense. It also shows, and perhaps even proves, that even God has his moments of privacy. Mary was so involved with her son from the moment of his conception and then all through his hidden and then public life. Then there she is, standing on Calvary watching as her son gives his life. It would seem totally unrealistic of God to have her wait to meet her triumphant son. Her relationship with her son is absolutely unique not only as his mother, but even more importantly as one who knew intimately what his mission was and who totally with all her being shared as much as humanly possible in all that it involved. Christ was and

is the Redeemer, but Mary as his mother was totally involved along the side lines. Her relationship with the redemptive act of her son in every second that it was played out, was absolutely total as far as that was humanly possible. And one can only try to imagine what she must have felt like when just before Jesus gave his life, he gave her, his mother, to his closest apostle, John, to watch over her. Jesus gave away the most valuable person in his life knowing that she would be one hundred percent for it, for it was her way of really sharing in the work of her son. Mary is so unique in salvation history, especially in her total willingness to do her part, to follow what her creator, her God asked of her. Yes, Mary indeed must have been the first person to see the resurrected lord and savior, her son.

Finally, there is something else which hopefully happens during this octave which is of the greatest importance for believers today, something mentioned at the beginning of this writing. It is the fact that the Apostles had such a difficult time in coming to grips with the fact that Christ really did rise from the dead. This fact in itself give us today confidence that the resurrection really did happen. Without all the doubts described, there could easily be a suspicion that perhaps it was all made up and did not happen. This may seem very unlikely to a believer today, but it could open the door for those who do not believe or refuse to believe. Jesus wanted no doubts then or today of his resurrection to become pitfalls for anyone with an open mind.

Now comes the difficult task of making the Resurrection of Jesus something of importance in 2010, some two thousand years after the event. Just how much does the Resurrection play a role in our lives today, in the life of people everywhere in the world. No doubt for half the population of the world it matters nothing at all. But for all those who have been touched by Christianity in one form or another, does it play a role in their lives? Christ's resurrection was the only event which Jesus pointed to which would prove that he was indeed who he claimed to be, the Son of God made man, and that all his teachings were true and the word of God himself. His resurrection also points to the fact that all of the Old Testament patriarchs and prophets had predicted this great event, that it had been planned by God from the very beginning, even in the Garden of Eden immediately after Adam and Eve had sinned. Perhaps it should be stated that it proves that God had never once given up on human beings but that his original plan for humans while side-tracked by sin, would still prevail to its fullest extent. In fact, because of original sin, God's plan was to now be made even more perfect in showing his infinite love and care for the human race, for every single human being, past, present and future. At the beginning of the liturgy of Holy Saturday night, the priest in the opening proclamation of Easter sings "O Happy Fault, O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a Redeemer!"

All this is not something which just happens in one's life. It is something one must mull over, must quietly pray over, must talk with the Lord and ask him to help them grow deeper in their faith, their understanding of just what God has done out of love. Every time one commits a deliberate sin, defying their God, they ratify Adam's sin. Yet, there is always the possibility as long as one is alive, to accept what God has done through his Son, to accept his sacrifice to heal them, to restore their original innocence. It is up to each one to accept the resurrection, to accept Christ, to accept his love, to accept him their God! Christ is ready! The question is, are we ready?

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