

Abide in Christ

Encountering the Risen Christ



Archbishop John C. Wester

As we celebrate Easter this year, it occurs to me that we Catholics are in danger of seeing this central doctrine of our faith as an intellectual abstraction rather than considering how Christ's resurrection touches our lives in the here and now. We may see Christ's victory over sin and death as a wonderful turn of events for Jesus who died such a horrible death, but do we see how His resurrection affects me?

The Gospel writers make very significant links between the resurrected Christ and the Jesus who walked with us on this earth. With the disciples,

we notice the grave clothes lying in the tomb, we see the nail marks in Christ's hands and sides, and we learn of Jesus eating fish with His followers on the lake shore. True, He has a glorified body – He is not simply resuscitated back into an earthly existence – but the connection between the earthly Jesus and the risen Christ is significant: just as the resurrection of Christ gives the earthly Jesus new life, so too does it give new life to His body, the Church; that is, to you and me.

This means that we, the living stones of the Church, members of Christ's body, are already experiencing the first installments of the resurrection. We will have to wait for the end of time before we take our place with Christ in heaven, but we can and do experience the new life Christ makes possible through his resurrection right here and now. Just as the resurrection had an immediate impact on Christ's body, it has an immediate influence on us as individuals and as a Church.

For just this reason, we spent all of Lent preparing to renew our baptismal promises. It was at baptism that we were made one with Christ,

and at baptism we became intimate sharers in His Paschal mystery – His suffering, death and resurrection. Christ, the alpha and the omega, takes us immediately and intimately into His life-giving embrace and works in us constantly throughout our lives, freeing us from sin and calling us to new life each moment, including right here and now. We look forward to the fullness of His kingdom in heaven one day, but we give thanks for the ways in which we are already experiencing that kingdom in this life.

Easter is the time to allow the resurrection of Christ to transform us and our relationships. As the Paschal candle symbolizes, Easter shines a bright light on each of us, calling us to new life. This is a time for deepening the bonds of marriage, family ties and friendships. It is a time to break free from habits of sin that weigh us down and destroy the hope and joy that God desires for each of us. It is a time to reach out to others in charity, giving of time, talent and treasure and discovering how much we receive when we are selfless rather than selfish. This is a season of grace.

Easter is a time when our lives are transformed by allowing the grace of the resurrection to work in us now.

The Resurrection is a transformation, not only for Jesus but for us. This is the message of Easter. Like Mary Magdalene in John's Gospel, who "turned around" at the empty tomb to encounter Christ on Easter morning, you and I are called to "turn our lives around" so that we can embrace the risen Christ. Like Saint Thomas, we are invited to touch His hands and side to reassure ourselves that He exists in this world. We are asked to open our eyes and our hearts to see how Jesus of Nazareth has truly risen, appearing to us now with the gifts of grace and new life.

This transforming touch of Christ comes to us as we spend time in quiet prayer, read the Scriptures and, most especially, when we gather for Eucharist to experience the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ sacramentally. Each time we "do this in remembrance" of Him, we encounter the living and risen Christ who invites us to experience the kingdom here and now. Then, we are sent out to live our transformation in the here and now of our daily lives. We are, after all, an Easter people, and "Alleluia" is our song.

May our encounter of the Risen Christ transform all of us this Easter Season!

Sincerely Yours in the Risen Lord

+ John C. Wester

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