

Jesus is Risen Indeed

Scriptures tells us that Mary Magdalene and the other women went to Jesus' tomb on that first Easter Sunday. They found the stone rolled away, but they did not see Jesus either dead or alive. They did see two men in dazzling clothes, angels we would call them, who told the women that Jesus was raised, but they did not see Jesus himself. Over the next forty days, between Jesus' rising from the grave and his Ascension into Heaven, Jesus did appear, as Peter said in Acts, "Not to all people, but to those chosen to be witnesses." Eventually the risen Christ appeared to all eleven of the remaining disciples and to more than 500 others who believed in him. He could do this because Jesus is risen, **He is risen indeed.**

You and I have never seen the resurrected Christ, at least not the way the eleven disciple and those other believers did. Unlike Doubting Thomas, we have never been privileged to put our fingers in Jesus' nail scarred hands, or put our hand in his side where a spear pierced him through. Yet, somehow, we believe in Christ's resurrection although we have not seen him. We can and do know that Jesus is alive, Jesus is risen, **He is risen indeed,** even though we have not seen him with our own eyes.

In a similar way, we know that hydrogen atoms are all around us in the air we breath. No one has ever seen a hydrogen atom; they are too small to be seen. We can make models of hydrogen atoms, but we know that the atoms themselves in reality look nothing at all like the models. All of our knowledge about chemistry and physics is based on concepts like atoms, that we cannot see, and mental constructs like time and space, that are largely subjective experiences. Still, we can use these concepts and constructs that we can neither see nor completely understand to make medicines to cure our diseases and energy to run our appliances. Just because we cannot see something does not mean that it is not real or that it cannot be useful to us.

As we said, we have not seen the risen Christ with our own two eyes although Jesus is risen, **He is risen indeed**. Our faith is based on believing the reliable testimony of those faithful witnesses who did see him alive. Neither can we say that we fully understand Jesus. Who can adequately explain the two natures of the One who is both fully human and fully divine? Who can explain the love of Christ that is so deep that he laid down his innocent life on the cross for sinners such as you and me? How can we explain the mystery and wonder of the Empty Tomb, the conquering of sin, death, and the devil? We cannot, but again, we trust the Great Tradition of the Church and Word of Holy Scripture.

As we read and hear the story of Christ, the story that climaxes in the discovery of the Empty tomb, it is interesting to consider what the gospels, the stories of Jesus life, death, and resurrection, don't tell us. For instance, the gospels don't give us anything like a complete biography of Jesus. Many people point out that we have no record of what Jesus did from the time he was twelve years old until he began his ministry at age thirty. Even the records of his ministry are spotty at best. We don't have a minute to minute accounting of his activities. Jesus didn't blog or twitter or Facebook. The gospel authors, the Evangelists, just tell us just as much as we need to know for our salvation, so that we might come to believe in Christ. For Jesus is risen, **He is risen indeed**.

In the gospels there is also precious little in the way of instruction for daily life. The Bible is not primarily a rulebook or ethical treatise. Which is not to say that God doesn't care how we live our lives – He most certainly does. But there is no direct connection between morality and the Empty Tomb because our good works are irrelevant to our salvation. Jesus didn't rise again because we were so good he wanted to come back and reward us.

We don't earn the benefits of Christ's resurrection by anything we do. In fact, it was the leaders of the most advanced monotheistic religion of the time, the Jews, aided by the most

advanced system of government at the time, the Romans, who, representing, representing both the best of humanity and the totality of human sin and depravity, conspired to kill Jesus. Humanity's best efforts only resulted in the murder of God's only Son. The Empty Tomb, then, is all about God's grace, not humanity's achievement. God loves us, and raised Jesus from the dead as proof of that love, because of who He is, not what we are.

Perhaps the most convincing proof of the resurrection is of the type that would never stand up in a court of law today. There was no CSI or NCIS team around then to scientifically prove Jesus' resurrection. Yet, we know Jesus lives, that Jesus is risen, **He is risen indeed**, because we have experienced his live presence in our hearts. We have felt his love for us. His Spirit is all around us. That is how we know Jesus is risen, **He is risen indeed**.

Thomas Aquinas, a priest, monk, and theologian, before the Reformation, wrote a book called the *Summa Theologica*, that is still one of the most influential books in all of Western Christianity. Some time after writing that great work, Thomas had a mystical experience at the celebration of Holy Communion and he said afterward, "All I have written is straw." George Frederick Handel, the composer of the masterpiece *The Messiah*, barely ate or slept for 23 days while he was composing it. After that work was completed a servant found him in tears and Handel said, "I have truly seen paradise and the great God himself."

Such experiences defy our human limitations and push the boundaries of the capabilities to comprehend. But in such moments we know that Jesus is risen, **He is risen indeed**. Our personal experiences may be less dramatic, but whenever we read or hear the Word, whenever we receive the sacrament, Christ comes to us proving that he is alive. Jesus is risen, **He is risen indeed**. And may the peace of God, that passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.