

ARCHIVES EASTER

## INNER VIEWS

### He is Risen! Still !

Before Jesus died the apostles, Jesus' followers, found that when they were with Jesus they were better people. When he was gone they reverted to their old ways. There was something about the nobleness and graciousness of his presence that brought out the best within them.

We've met people whose presence makes us want to be on our best behavior. And we've also met a few special people whose presence calms something within us, puts us at ease with a graciousness that brings out our best.

After the death of Jesus the apostles reverted to their old fear driven, self-defensive ways. But gradually they began to realize that something had shifted in them. They felt an inner inspiration, a loosening of fear, a willingness to trust the Father's presence alive within their community. And they began to realize that Jesus was still among them - this time through their own lives.

At first Christ appeared among them in strange ways. The door was locked but here he was. And he wasn't a ghost, he invited them to touch him, or share food with him. The two disciples didn't recognize him on the road to Emmaus. But when he "broke bread" they knew him.

That was the point of his last supper with them: "Whenever you do this, do it in memory of me." "I am always with you. I will feed you with myself, my body and blood. And you will continue to be my body and blood walking this earth". The Kingdom of God truly was within them as it is within us.

We all experience this reality in our own way. When I become aware of a deepening of my faith it feels like the ice begins to melt in the middle of my being. I feel the trickle of running energy. Something new is alive and moving within me. I am able to live my values with new freedom and energy - freedom and energy that comes from beyond my abilities to produce.

I've heard many people say this about going to Mass. They feel better throughout the week. And they feel like something is missing when they don't have the chance for Mass. This is grace, God's love and life, Christ's spirit enlivening their lives. It's what Jesus' disciples experienced. It brings out the best within us.

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You might experience this graciousness of Christ as a fire burning within you -a need to act on your inspiration. Or you might become aware of a tenderness taking hold of your heart. You feel spontaneously more compassionate, connected to others in shared humanness. Others feel more hopeful. Some feel like a burden has been lifted off their shoulders.

Every one of us experience this stirring of "Amazing grace" in our own way. Just know this, Christ is risen. And we are his risen body and blood.

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## Easter Sunday

On the third day the friends of Christ coming at daybreak to the place found the grave empty and the stone rolled away. In varying ways they realized the new wonder; but even they hardly realized that the world had died in the night. What they are looking at was the first day of a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth; and in a semblance of the gardener God walked again in the garden, in the cool not of the evening but that dawn.

G. K. Chesterton – "The Everlasting Man."

There is no insight, idea, feeling or dogma that can express the meaning of this tragic death of an innocent man. Nothing we use to interpret it is big enough to carry its meaning. Neither grief, nor pity, nor compassion, not even outrage can contain the cross. We feel an echo of this in the death of our loved ones. No matter what we say to console ourselves, it is not enough, it's just something to say to keep our mind off the grief.

Paradoxically, when we are willing to accept the futility of any explanation, we can be drawn into the meaning of Jesus' living, dying and rising. In letting go of our minds, our feelings, our ego, our self as the source of meaning, we can surrender to the Father as our Source. With Jesus we find that we receive new life only by surrendering. We become, not "self-less" but surrendered. We are enabled to exist on a

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plain where our Father and our true self is free to come and go, to share an intimate friendship without restraint or fear. This is what Jesus' disciples found to be their truth.

On the cross the disciple' hopes for Jesus died. They had hoped for a powerful Messiah who could turn stones into bread and be protected by God's angels. They thought that they had attached themselves to a Messiah whose shirttails they could ride into a new kingdom of riches, fame, glory and power.

When their hopes died their small self, their ego-mind also died and for the first time they were able to see and hear from their hearts. Their golden chain was broken along with their hopes. For the first time they came to know the hidden treasure of the Father's intimate and creative love bursting forth within them. They began to catch on that they too might be "My beloved child." And they rose with Jesus. For they too must wrap their flesh and blood around divinity so that they can carry on the work he began. Crosses stand all around us, shrouding our world, throbbing with the human wound, and aching for a healing heart.

What Jesus' followers learned from experience is meant to be our experience also. The revelation of Easter is that "Jesus, who was dead, is alive." But more than this, the revelation is that Jesus continues in our flesh and blood. When we are able to get beyond being the center of our own lives and open our hearts to the Father we find that Jesus' qualities are alive within us. This is the "repentance" that Lent is all about. It is the beginning of our salvation that Jesus gave us through his death, resurrection and ascension. It is the healing of our wounded humanness that our spiritual path is meant to awaken us to. As long as our beliefs are about lofty ideals couched in the name of Jesus we are missing the point. The point is our lives, healed by Jesus, fed around our Father's table, are sent out to feed all those who are spiritually hungry. Easter becomes more and more real when Jesus becomes an intimate presence in our real lives.

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## INNER VIEWS

Sunday after Easter

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“When wilt thou save the people,

O Lord of Mercy when?

The people, Lord the people,

Now crowns and thrones but men!

God save the people!”

I woke up this morning, the morning after the Easter celebration of our salvation with these lyrics ringing between my ears. During this Easter Season we are supposed to luxuriate in our salvation. And yet something is still missing for me.

Theologians have a ready explanation. They say “You are saved but salvation isn’t fully realized within you.” That makes sense to my head but it still doesn’t drive out the ringing lyrics – “When wilt thou save the people.” Something is still missing.

Another musical comes to my rescue: “I don’t know how to love him” from Jesus Christ Superstar. I share in Mary Magdalene’s longing and later when Judas the betrayer sings it I share in his desperation. Jesus had ignited his hopes to create a better world that would free his people from the Roman tyranny. And when Jesus smashes that idol Judas feels betrayed: “I don’t know how to love him...”

In these weeks after Easter we read Gospels about Jesus’ continued living presence – he who was dead is alive! And alive in a new way, in a different way. He is unrecognizable at first glance. And he appears in rooms where the door is locked. Is this a ghost? “Touch me” he tells them. And then he eats with them. Ghosts don’t eat. But solid bodied humans can’t walk through walls. What’s happening here?

It doesn’t make sense. Can we live with this? Maybe living with Jesus the Mystery will take us somewhere that understanding Jesus the dogma can’t.

To my mind the lyrics of these musicals bring me closer to Jesus than the verses of most of the songs we sing on Sunday. I think that these musical writers approach Jesus as a mystery. Mystery opens us up to transcendence, to divine presence. Dogma shuts us down with answers to unasked questions. Mystery involves us into the adventure of God’s love and our humanness. Dogma jumps to the end of the book

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for the answer. The case maybe solved but the real relationship happens in following the trail of the leads.

Rudolf Otto after spending years studying people's experience of God described the experience as being fascinating and awesome. We intuit God as the Mystery that fascinates our hearts with longing and hope. And when we follow our fascination we begin to experience the wonder and awe and fear of God who is beyond anything we can contain or control. The closer we get to God, our heart's desire, the more we are surrounded by the mystery that enflames our desire. And this is devastatingly personal. Our desire is actually an echo of Divine desire for us. And God desires everything for us and from us.

Our God is Beauty and Beauty expresses the essence of our soul. It brings to consciousness that which cannot be marred by our world. Maybe we need to spend time with this mystery and savor its beauty – just like we would on a beautiful day. Maybe jumping to conclusions shuts us down. Let me leave you with one of my favorite prayers from St. Augustine who found God in his search for human love.

Late have I loved you, O Beauty, ever ancient, ever new.

Late have I loved you.

For behold you were within me, and I outside.

And I sought you outside

and in my unloveliness fell upon those lovely things that you had made.

You with me, and I was not with you.

I was kept from you by those,

yet had they not been in you,

they would not have been at all.

You did call and cry to me to break open my deafness

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and you did send forth your beams to shine upon me  
and chase away my blindness.

You breathed fragrance upon me,  
and I drew in my breath and do now pant for you.  
I tasted you and now hunger and thirst for you.

You touched me, and I burn for your peace.

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## INNER VIEWS

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday after Easter

The Shroud of Turin was in the news this Eastern week. It could possibly be the shroud in which Jesus was buried. Recent scientific tests have found plant pollen on the Shroud that came from the time and location of Jesus' death. Rigorous scientific study finds intriguing hints as to the shroud's origin but so far nothing that makes it definitely the shroud involved in Jesus' death.

In my experience this is the way of spiritual things. They don't close the deal and give absolute proof to our religious beliefs. At the same time they suggest that our beliefs have some basis in physical reality. The responsibility of choosing what we want to trust in our lives remains a matter for our discernment.

One of the Sunday morning shows featured a segment on the miracles at Lourdes. A friend of mine, who is Catholic by upbringing but skeptical by nature, went to Lourdes as part of a tour. He found it to be grossly commercialized and at the same time effused with a spiritual aura.

Lourdes is based on the hope of miraculous healings associated with a stream of water that began to flow miraculously for Bernadette of Lourdes. There are cures but they are very few in comparison to the

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throng of people seeking relief. And yet even more people are deeply affected with a generosity, compassion and sense of meaning that is far beyond their expectations. They might not get what they came for but they often leave with a rich new dimension to their lives.

Again, Lourdes intrigues with the possibility of physical miracles but leaves us on the edge. It opens the door to faith and a spiritual depth to reality but it doesn't shove us through that door. We are left with a choice. Are we willing to trust? This seems to me to be the nature of spiritual things, God intrigues us with possibilities but ultimately leaves us with responsibility. God isn't teasing us. I believe this is the way faith needs to unfold if it is going to help us relate to God as God is and not simply as we hope God to be.

In these weeks after Easter we will see these same kind of ambiguities and hints of spiritual realities playing themselves out in the disciples of Jesus. Nothing turned out the way they expected it. Jesus was a failure as a political messiah and a miraculous savior. They lost their hope in the God they expected. And they gradually began to awaken to the reality of Jesus continuing in their lives. The stories of Jesus' appearances are much like the shroud and Lourdes, they entice us with what seem to be physical proofs, but these evaporate into a spiritual awakening, awareness and aliveness. Jesus is here, God is present, but our lives become the expression of the reality.

I believe this is the reality of who God is in our lives and who we are because of who God is. I also believe that this excludes a literal approach to understanding the scriptures as well as all things spiritual. We are given the impression that taking the scriptures literally, word for word, is the only way to take them seriously. But not only is it impossible to take them literally, we always interpret them according to our point of view, and we always begin with a translation that is itself an interpretation, so there is nothing to take literally. We are not given answers, we are invited into responsibility, into learning to respond to God working in our lives, God loving us into existence at every moment and creating us as responsible partners in God's creation. Black and white propositions, either/ or categories, dogmas and practices that exclude non adherents, beliefs that affirm our special place in God's design, are not part of God's plan. All of these feed our ego and spring from it. God works with our heart which is built on love, created in the image and likeness of God. God does not allow us to accept anything less.

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