

## Monastic Scribe LXX: March 22, 2024

### THE HEART OF CHRISTIANITY

Easter Sunday is the greatest feast of the Christian liturgical year. Is that really so? I wonder whether most Christians, particularly Catholics, feel that is the reality. It looks like Christmas has become a bigger holiday for us, maybe also a bigger religious feast. We can identify with the birth of a baby while Resurrection is largely unknown (or is it really?). The birth of Christ was celebrated for the first time only in the fourth century. Two of the four gospels, Mark and John, as well as all the epistles of Paul and other epistles have no record of the birth of Christ. Easter, and its weekly Sunday commemoration, was there from the beginning.

Easter was the heart of the apostles' teachings. It was the event that inspired these timid people to proclaim openly the living Christ. When the eleven apostles gathered in a post-resurrection meeting, they had to find a substitute for Judas. They set up two qualifications for the new apostle. First, he had to be with the followers of Christ from the beginning. Secondly, he had to be a witness of the Resurrected Christ. And they chose Matthias. For 2000 years the Resurrection of Christ, coupled with his passion and death, has been taught as "the paschal mystery," life out of death (not just life after death).

Maybe resurrection is not as strange as it seems. The created cosmos is full of death and resurrection. Stars die and the remnants become a new star or a planet like our own. Animals die, plants die, all that lives eventually dies but the ashes become new life. We breathe the same air that Jesus breathed. God became human flesh in the incarnation. It makes sense that the human body will live forever as God. Of course the body must change; the old must die. Saint Paul calls us living humans with perishable bodies. But the resurrected body puts on imperishability. We call the resurrected Christ "the cosmic Christ." The human from Galilee fills the cosmos with his being because he is one with God. But, as the gospels show, this cosmic Christ can appear in his old human body. There is something new. There is something old. I am not saying we can scientifically prove all of this. But if we become prayerful people, open to our own hearts and to the cosmos, we do find we know the Christ is still alive and with us. Yes, we know it! The death and resurrection of Jesus, the paschal mystery, is the pattern for the cosmos.

Saint Paul had an encounter with the risen Christ who spoke to him saying, "Saul, why do you persecute me?... I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." This story is

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repeated three times in the Acts (9, 22, 26) and referred to in many of the epistles. The three accounts have small discrepancies of detail which indicate that they were separate oral accounts handed down as the first preaching of the Christian community. This encounter with Christ shook Paul profoundly. It led to great insights about Jesus, his oneness with us, the nature of the incarnation, the first account of the Eucharist, the nature of the mystical body of Christ which includes all of us in the resurrection. "I live, not I, but Christ lives in me" is an example of how Paul sees Christ being our truest selves.

We are indebted to Paul for his theological reflections on the resurrection as found in the first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 15. Here are some quotes: "If there is no resurrection from the dead, then Christ has not been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain." Did you get that? Christmas and Good Friday are not enough for our redemption. Easter Sunday is not just a personal reward for Jesus as once was taught. "If Christ has not been raised, then your faith has been futile... For if in this life only we have hoped in Christ we are of all people most to be pitied."

Paul, all the other apostles, disciples, and all the early church, were convinced of the resurrection of Jesus and it became the center of their teaching. Later, in the middle ages, when the church emphasis turned to sin, atonement, redemption in the next life, then the centrality of the resurrection slipped from our central consciousness. Is our faith sad and low-keyed? We need to look within, to be quiet and attentive to find this living Jesus.

Mary Magdalen is a model and inspiration for us believers. The key to her faith was her love for Jesus. She knew him, understood him as few others did, found the courage to follow him and then be at the foot of the cross. Then, on Sunday, she rose up in the dawn's early light to go to the tomb and the resurrected Jesus called her by name.

We are grateful for her faith and her love as we feebly dare to place our trust in the risen One. In a time like ours when the world seems to be at wit's end, when chaos abounds and people look for easy answers, the presence of the Risen Christ in our midst is our strength to persevere in faith. We proclaim it every Sunday, the "Lord's Day." We are encouraged by the Orthodox Church which has kept the resurrection as the center of faith. On Easter night each person shouts "Christ is Risen, alleluia!" and the response is "Christ is truly Risen, alleluia!" The icon of

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Jesus rising from the dead over the tombs of Adam and Eve is in every church. Let us be, like them, Easter People and sing out our alleluias with gusto.

Happy Easter from [joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org)

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Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.