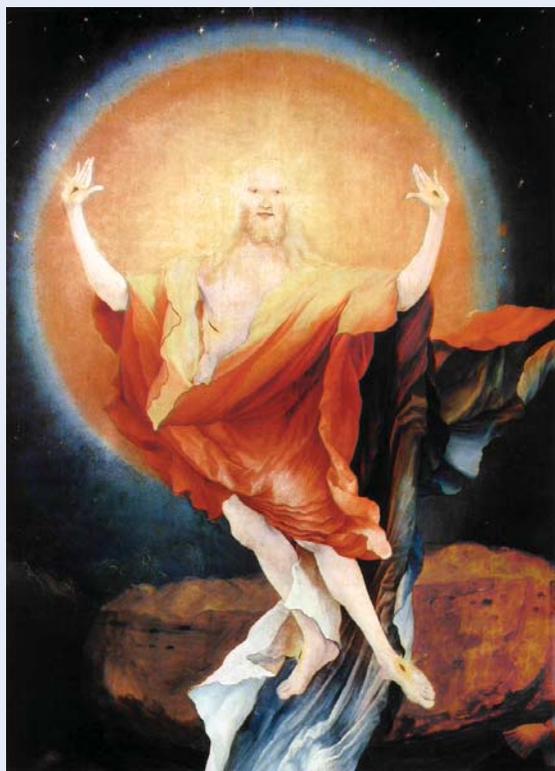


Maronite Monks of Adoration

HE IS RISEN

“On the third day He rose again from the dead.”
(The Creed)

“If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.”
(1 Cor. 15:14)



The Resurrection (detail)
— Matthias Grünewald (c. 1516)

Nobody could have said it better than St. Paul. If Jesus Christ did not truly rise from the dead then his (Paul's) work of evangelization, and consequently our faith, would be a waste of time. We might as well spend Sunday mornings sleeping in late, going out for a nice big brunch or spending the time doing house and yard work. (Unfortunately this describes how too many Christians spend their Sundays these days). Nevertheless, St. Paul stresses that the Resurrection of Christ constitutes the very essence of our faith for that event proves His Divinity: that Jesus Christ is truly the Incarnate Son of God. It is this belief that separates us from all the rest and makes us Christian.

We can see the centrality of the Resurrection in these words from Catholic apologist Dr. Peter Kreeft: *“Every sermon preached by every Christian in the New Testament centers on the Resurrection. The Gospel, or ‘good news,’ means essentially the news of Christ’s Resurrection. The message that flashed across the ancient world was not ‘love your neighbor.’ Every morally sane person already knew that; it was not*

news. The news was that a man who claimed to be the Son of God and the Savior of the world had risen from the dead.”

When a Catholic abandons the faith (and that's the word. You do not “lose” your faith. You lose your car keys or wallet, but you “abandon” your faith) usually he or she has come to reject these three essential beliefs: the Divinity of Christ, the Resurrection of Christ, and the Real Presence of Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist. Reject one of these and all the rest, including the faith itself, come tumbling down like a house of cards. Much of what was touted as the “new catechesis” taught some form of the following as explaining the credal statement – *“On the third day He rose again from the dead.”*

The essence of this false teaching can be summarized as the following: *“The disciples, they say, saw no phenomena of whatever origin; the revelation was of a different order of reality. As the disciples pondered upon Christ’s life among them, its true significance gradually unfolded as the revelation of a new mode of living, of relating to each other. They realized that He had led them to a breakthrough in their apprehension of what it meant to be fully human, and this revelatory experience released in them a new spirit of love and forgiveness. In this spirit, Jesus may be truly described as having transcended His death, to have remained ‘alive’ among His followers. He was present in the prophetic spirit released in the early Christian community. The ‘resurrection experience’ is entirely subjective.”*

Whenever you hear the term “resurrection **experience**” alarm bells should go off. The Resurrection was not an “experience” but an **event**. One might call this “Woodstock theology” (after that infamous event).

So what constitutes the basis for the statement “On the third day He rose again from the dead”? First, we have eyewitness testimony. Remember that the Apostles at first doubted His Resurrection. Thomas specifically asked to probe the wounds of Christ with his hand to prove that he was not seeing a ghost. Could the Apostles have created a grand fish tale? Catholic philosopher Pascal thinks not: *“The apostles were either deceived or deceivers. Either supposition is difficult, for it is not possible to imagine that a man has risen from the dead. While Jesus was with them, he could sustain them; but afterwards, if He did not appear to them, who did make them act? The hypothesis that the Apostles were knaves is quite absurd. Follow it out to the end, and imagine these twelve men meeting after Jesus’ death and conspiring to say that He had risen from the dead. This means attacking all the powers that be. The human heart is singularly susceptible to fickleness, to change, to promises, to bribery. One of them had only to deny his story under these inducements, or still more because of possible imprisonment, tortures and death, and they would all have been lost. Follow that out.”*

All the Apostles (John being the exception) died a martyr’s death. Peter and Andrew were crucified. James (brother of John) and Paul were beheaded. James, Brother of the Lord, was stoned to death and Bartholomew was flayed (skinned) alive just to cite a few examples. Would you undergo a death like that for something you knew to be false? Had anyone of these Apostles said, “*We made up the story of Jesus’ resurrection: it didn’t really happen*”: their lives would have been spared. Dr. Peter Kreeft comments on this: *“The ‘clincher’ in this argument is the historical fact that no one, weak or strong, saint or sinner, Christian or heretic, ever confessed, freely or under pressure, bribe or even torture, that the whole story of the Resurrection was a fake, a lie, a deliberate deception. Even when people broke under torture,*

*denied Christ and worshiped Caesar, they never let that cat out of the bag, never revealed that the Resurrection was their conspiracy. For that cat was never in that bag. No Christians believed the Resurrection was a conspiracy; if they had, they wouldn’t have become Christians ... The Apostles’ character argues strongly against such a conspiracy on the part of all of them, with no dissenters. They were simple, honest, common peasants, not cunning, conniving liars. They weren’t even lawyers! Their sincerity is proved by their words **and** deeds. They preached a resurrected Christ, and they lived a resurrected Christ. They willingly died for their ‘conspiracy’ (fish tale). Nothing proves sincerity like martyrdom.”*

Remember that Christ’s crucifixion was a **public** event. Eyewitnesses abounded in Jerusalem. If the Resurrection were a lie the Jews would have produced the body and killed the fable before it even started. Pontius Pilate and the Romans supported the Jews, not the Christians: not much help for the Christians there! With all the eyewitnesses in Jerusalem, the Apostles would never have gotten away with proclaiming the Resurrection in Jerusalem where so many could have refuted it. As writer William Craig states: *“The Gospels were written in such temporal and geographical proximity to the events they record that it would have been almost impossible to fabricate events ... The fact that the disciples were able to proclaim the resurrection in Jerusalem in the face of their enemies a few weeks after the crucifixion shows that what they proclaimed was true, for they could never have proclaimed the resurrection (and been believed) under such circumstances had it not occurred.”*

Also note a little noticed Gospel detail which is significant in distinguishing the Gospels from myth: the first witnesses of the Resurrection were women (the men were all hiding). In first-century Judaism, women had low social status and no legal right to serve as witnesses. If the empty tomb were an invented legend, its inventors surely would not have had it discovered by women, whose testimony was considered worthless.

And secondly, look at the effect and results of the Resurrection. On Pentecost, the Risen Jesus came

upon the Apostles by the Holy Spirit and turned these common peasant men into fearless preachers of the Resurrection and carried that message throughout the world, even to the point of a martyr's death. They had no armies at their command nor great wealth or political power: just the spirit of the Risen Christ. And that spirit would conquer Rome.

What does this mean for us? As the Catechism of the Catholic Church says: *“The Paschal mystery has two aspects: by His death, Christ liberates us from sin; by His Resurrection, He opens for us the way to a new life. This new life is above all justification that reinstates us in*

God's grace, 'so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life'..Finally, Christ's Resurrection — and the risen Christ Himself — is the principle and source of our future resurrection.”

While the “gates of Hell” seek to prevail over the Church and darkness seems to be descending, nevertheless be of brave heart. Why? Because the Risen Christ is with us. *“In the world you have tribulation; but have confidence, I **have overcome the world.**”* (John 16:33) ✠