

The Resurrection

Last month we spoke about the challenges to our faith and belief posed by modern culture. Tonight we will use the Resurrection as an example and we will discover that our faith has always involved challenges.

Let us begin with the earliest *written* account as it appears in the Gospel of Mark. Mary Magdalene and two other women went to the tomb where the crucified Jesus had been laid in order to anoint his body with spices. To their surprise they found that the large stone used to seal the tomb had been rolled back:

On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were utterly amazed. He said to them, "Do not be amazed! You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. But go and tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.' " Then they went out and fled from the tomb, seized with trembling and bewilderment. They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. - Mark 16:5-8

That is how the Gospel of Mark originally ended according to most Biblical scholars. Consider the last verse: "***They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.***" The women were terrified because they had encountered something totally unexpected, in spite of the Jesus's earlier predictions which neither they nor the disciples had understood.

We know from the other Gospels that they overcame their fear, encountered Jesus and informed the disciples. But consider their first reaction: trembling, bewilderment and fear. That is an appropriate reaction to a mighty act of God which the women sensed.

And perhaps, in a way, we share a less appropriate kind of fear when it comes to *talking about the Resurrection* both inside and outside of Church: a fear that we will appear ridiculous because we believe something that modern man does not accept as possible and reduces the Resurrection to an imaginary, symbolic story. Our reaction also has an early precedent. Consider the earliest Christian *preaching* about the crucified (and risen) Messiah by Saint Paul:

For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles ...
- 1 Corinthians 1:22-23.

Saint Paul knew his message was hard for educated, intelligent people to accept. But the Jesus of the Resurrection was real, not a symbol, and so Paul persisted as we must.

Our Christian faith is uncompromisingly based on the reality of the Resurrection. As Saint Paul explains it: “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:14).

As we said last month, faith is a gift from God that requires a response. The response required of us by the Resurrection is to familiarize ourselves with the witness to the resurrection in the Gospels and in the letters of Saint Paul so we can explain it to others.

Matters of faith, by definition, are not scientifically verifiable. But that does not mean that they are any less real than scientific facts. If we invest the time to become familiar with the witness of Sacred Scripture and the history of our Church, we will find our belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus to be intellectually plausible.

Here are some reasons for believing in the Resurrection as real and not symbolic:

1. The crucifixion and resurrection are both historical events: they happened at a particular time in history. They are not myths free of history.
2. The resurrection was not expected by the disciples. They were devastated by the crucifixion of their master and fled in fear for their own lives. The resurrection was a complete surprise and was not the result of wishful thinking.
3. The disciples’ belief in the resurrection required numerous appearances of the risen Jesus. The appearances needed to be personally experienced (e.g., Thomas) and even a single appearance left some in doubt (see Matthew 28:17). The disciples were not credulous.
4. The dynamic change in the disciples and their successful spreading of the good news of the risen Christ can only be explained by their encounter of Him.
5. The message of the Gospel: that a man, Jesus of Nazareth, who spoke of the Kingdom of God, and was crucified as a common criminal was raised from the dead by God and vindicated as the Son of God is too incredible to be anything devised by human minds as a basis for a religion.

As members of the Knights of Columbus we are called to witness to our faith. Let us not fear to do so. Instead, let us spend the time to understand what we believe and the basis of that belief in sacred Scripture and the teachings of the Church. I have included a list of major Resurrection accounts and would like to conclude by reading the earliest from Saint Paul:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ... Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. **- 1 Corinthians 15:3-8,11.**

A listing of the major Resurrection accounts in Scripture:

In Paul's Letters:

1 Corinthians 15:3-11 (Resurrection appearances)
1 Corinthians 15:35-44 (On bodily resurrection)

In the Gospels:

Mark 16:1-8 (The women fled in fear)
Mark 16:9-20 (A later account of appearances)

Matthew 27:62-28:20 (Appearances in Jerusalem and Galilee)

Luke 24:1-53 (On the road to Emmaus & Jerusalem)

John 20:1-31 (To Mary M, the disciples and Thomas)
John 21:1-25 (To the disciples in Galilee)

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