

2nd Sunday Easter (Divine Mercy Sunday)

My Lord and My God

April 7, 2013

Readings: Acts 5:12-16; Revelation 1:9-13, 17-19; John 20:19-31

As a young college seminarian, I distinctly recall one Saturday morning during which we were given a survey from an organization in the Midwest.¹ By means of our answers to numerous statements, the survey was designed to determine whether and to what degree we possessed the key aptitudes necessary for the exercise of the priesthood. It was generally fine except for one question to which I took immediate exception. The quality was known as “Omni,” and it referred to whether or not this candidate had the ability to see the big picture– the forest as opposed to the trees. All was well enough until I began to read one of the questions.

“If scientists were able to definitively unearth the bones of Jesus, would your faith be shaken?” Without hesitation, I answered “Yes.” As it turns out, I lost points on that particular quality. In other words, “Wrong answer.” Well, if this is how they describe “Omni,”– I am relieved that I do not possess it. I made my disagreement known, and that was that. It remains all I still recall about that Saturday morning thirty years ago.

During this holy season of Easter, our Christian faith is most visibly manifest in our proclamation of the resurrection of Christ from the dead. How sad it is then, when people who should know better interpret such fundamental truths in a manner that denies the necessity of the physical resurrection of Jesus. Over the years, I have read in several Catholic publications: “*It makes no difference to Christian faith if the tomb is empty or not. Christian faith is not grounded on an empty tomb.*” They base this claim largely upon a late 19th century distinction between the “Jesus of History” and the “Christ of Faith.” Thankfully, this distinction has disappeared from any approved Catholic Catechetical texts, but it had its heyday.

¹ Priest Perceiver Interview, Selection Research Inc. (SRI), Omaha NE, 1984

There will always be those who doubt basic truths of the faith, and even people of faith struggle with questions to which there seem to be no easy answers. The reality of the resurrection was one such truth with which Jesus' disciples were not fully prepared to deal. Perhaps the shock of the Passion of Christ was so strong that some of the disciples could not at once believe that He had truly risen. They were demoralized, and we see this evidenced in the person of Thomas.

His act of doubt should not be held against him forever, for his doubt did not persist indefinitely. He spent his life spreading the Good News of the resurrection, and while his example should remind us all of the problem of doubt and disbelief, his entire life should be viewed from the perspective of heroic faith and apostolic zeal.

Questions persist with people today, as evidenced by my opening remarks. However, our questions are situated within the larger context of a lived faith that is beyond us, our generation, or even our century. The Christian faith and the Catholic Tradition encompass centuries of guidance by the Holy Spirit. We are part, albeit small parts, of the self-revelation of God's Love that includes the gift of His Church, His instrument on earth for our sanctification.

We believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ as the absolute cornerstone of our Catholic faith. The apostles remain the foundation stones of His Church as the primary witnesses to the resurrection. Their witness is crystal clear as to the nature of the resurrection. As the Catechism teaches:

“Given all these testimonies, Christ's Resurrection cannot be interpreted as something outside the physical order, and it is impossible not to acknowledge it as an historical fact.”²

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. #643.

Ultimately, we do not come to Church on Sunday to encounter an historical fact, but rather to encounter the person of Jesus Christ. When I was growing up, I was encouraged to make an interior prayer whenever the priest elevated the Sacred Host at Mass. I was told to make Thomas' words my own- "My Lord and my God." It is an affirmation of the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and an affirmation of belief in a mystery beyond our comprehension.

These affirmations are not contrary to reason, even if they are above human reason. The empty tomb is but another example where our faith must be our guide and our fervent hope. Jesus' resurrection has been deemed to be "the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; (and) handed on as fundamental by Tradition." ³

Today, we must be the witnesses, following in the apostolic faith handed onto us. The resurrection above all constitutes the confirmation of all Christ's works and teachings. As witnesses, you and I experience the power of His resurrection by our lives of faith, by showing mercy to one another, by gratefully accepting this divine mercy in our own hearts. We also fearlessly proclaim the reality of His resurrection and defend with vigor the truth against all attacks.

The Divine Mercy of our Savior makes the fullness of life possible for all who believe. Let us not be troubled by those who minimize the resurrection, but rather let us re-commit ourselves to be its strongest witnesses by means of our manifest joy. Let us too cry out, "My Lord and My God," marveling that He indeed is risen and in our midst.

³ Ibid., para. #638.