



The “Anastasis” of our Lord Jesus

In reading the Resurrection chapters of the four Gospels, the differences between the accounts are obvious.

Not one of the evangelists recounts the actual Resurrection. It is an event that is taking place within the mystery of God, between Jesus and the Father; by its very nature, the resurrection event lies outside human experience.

What lessons can we learn about the Resurrection from each of the Gospel accounts?

+ Mark's call to the cross

In the earliest Gospel account in Mark's Gospel (Chapter 16), the last scene is a startling one ... for the story ends with "[The women] came out and fled from the tomb, for they were possessed by fear and trembling, and they said nothing to anyone" (16:8).

The most striking aspect of Mark's ending is that we never encounter the Risen Lord. Instead, in the darkness of early morning, the women arrive at the tomb, they find the tomb opened and empty, and are greeted by a heavenly figure who gives them a commission: "Go and tell his disciples and Peter that he goes before you into Galilee; there you will see him as he told you" (16:7).

Mark's Resurrection account is meant to disturb the Christian readers who are invited to view their lives in the shadow of the cross.

+ Matthew's living Christ

Matthew tells the story of the resurrection in four scenes:

1. the women's experience at the tomb (28:1-7);
2. their short encounter with the risen Lord (28:8-10);
3. the Jewish leaders' attempt to suppress the story (28:11-15); the appearance to the disciples in Galilee (28:16-20).
4. The final scene, ending with the Great Commission (28:19-20), stands on its own as a programmatic conclusion to the entire Gospel.

The women present in Matthew's Resurrection chapter do not witness the Resurrection. They do experience the earthquake, the appearance of the angel, and the emptiness of the tomb, all of which are signs or traces of divine activity that has brought these things about.

+ John's Risen Lord

The resurrection stories of the fourth Gospel are a series of encounters between Jesus and his followers that reveal diverse 'faith reactions'. John tells of appearances of the Risen Lord in both Jerusalem and Galilee.

- Jesus did not simply return to normal biological life as one who, by the laws of biology, would eventually have to die again, as it was for Lazarus.
- Jesus is not a ghost ('spirit'). In other words, he does not belong to the realm of the dead but is somehow able to reveal himself in the realm of the living.
- The encounters with the Risen Lord are not the same as mystical experiences, in which the human spirit is momentarily drawn aloft out of itself and perceives the realm of the divine and eternal, only to return then to the normal horizon of its existence.

- The resurrection is a historical event that bursts open the dimensions of history and transcends it. The Resurrection as something akin to a radical 'evolutionary leap,' in which a new dimension of life emerges, a new dimension of human existence.

Jesus' Resurrection points beyond history but has left a footprint within history. Therefore, it can be attested by witnesses as an event of an entirely new kind.

In our highly technological world, the reality of the Resurrection becomes increasingly difficult to fathom. Some people state quite frankly that the whole story is simply out of date.

But the Resurrection is not a matter of theory and ideas, but a 'matter of the heart' and it can only be experienced and learned through a community's worship and liturgy. .

If the Resurrection were meant to be a historically verifiable occurrence, God wouldn't have performed it in the dark, without eyewitnesses. The Resurrection was an event transacted between God the Father and God the Son by the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Not a single Gospel tells us how it happened.

We don't know what he looked like when he was no longer dead, whether he burst the tomb in glory or came out like Lazarus, slowly unwrapping his shroud.

There are no words, there are only metaphors that invite us into a mystery beyond words.

In the midst of the dark, dirty and chaotic Holy Sepulcher Basilica is the tomb of Jesus, a shrine to the risen Christ. But he is not there.

In the midst of all the chaos found in the Holy Sepulcher building, I found that if I knelt long enough in some corner of the Church amidst religious groups seemingly at war with each other, I often experienced a strange peace and deep joy and consolation because of the resurrection of the man who was God's Son and our Savior.

The only way to discern, detect and discover the presence of the Risen Lord is on one's knees, in the midst of the chaos of the Church and the world.

The Resurrection is part of the mystery of God that the Divine acts so gently, that Creator only gradually builds up God's history within the great history of humankind.

~Fr. Michael Davitti, SX