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The Resurrection – not just a single event

by Anthony Egan SJ

For varied reasons, many people may find themselves uneasy with the joy of the Resurrection we celebrate liturgically at Easter. Some – faced with ongoing problems ranging from the fear generated by Covid-19, through economic woes like poverty and unemployment, to personal crises like bereavement, broken relationships, loneliness or depression – may even feel a profound lack of resurrection in their lives.

The good news, however, is that through a diligent journey with the Scriptures of the Easter Season, one may come to a deeper, more profound sense of hope amidst the chaos.

Easter proclaims joy and hope. To those living with fear, anxiety and sorrow, they all too easily seem a slap in the face. How can I be joyful as I deal with lockdown, the death of a loved one or the collapse of a significant relationship? How can I celebrate as I struggle to find a job, to feed and clothe myself and my family? And where is the hope for the future in a context of social inequality, economic downgrades, mounting corruption, the steady rise of populist authoritarianism, wars and rumours of war, and a sense that the great democratic dream is dying?

To some it may seem patently dishonest to pretend joy in such circumstances. Such behaviour may rightly be seen as the worst kind of pious escapism.

Yet if we look at the New Testament closely and see the Resurrection as more than just a single event, perhaps we can see a glimmer of light in the gloom. The Resurrection, certainly, is an event – the supreme example of what some theologians call God's interruption of human history. But it is also a process for those who experience it, the disciples.

The realisation that Christ's life and teachings are brutally cut short – a judicial murder resulting from a conspiracy of a ruthless ruling elite of Romans, nobles and religious authorities – is not the end. Faith in Christ is vindicated by the experience of Christ risen is not, as Scripture reveals, a one-off event. The Gospels depict a growing awareness by the disciples that their faith was not in vain.

Some disciples simply see an empty tomb and believe. For others, it is Christ present in their midst – in a garden, in an upper room, or on the road home to Emmaus. Some disciples want proof – and get it. And throughout the process until the Ascension there remain those who are uncertain about the Risen Christ and what they are to do next.

This is the genius of the New Testament and the Church's use of it during this Season. It speaks lovingly to disciples of every shade of faith and doubt. It challenges us to change our attitude and to act in faith.

For those today who feel they are still living through personal and collective Passions, though this Season may not change their situation, a close and faithful engagement with the Resurrection may offer the promise that – however slowly – life emerges out of death, joy out of sorrow, hope out of despair.



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