

## *From the Rector's Study ~*

Following a season of introspection come this season of Easter. It is a season as well as a day. And it is a way of life as well as a season. Scholar and author John MacQuarrie observes in his book *The Faith of the People of God* that, "Most important of all the events in the life Christ was its end – his sufferings and death." He rightly notes that, "All the Gospels devote much of their space to a detailed account of his last days and hours." But he goes on to observe that, "The death of Jesus is an impressive and significant event, but according to the testimony of the Gospels, it was not the end of the story. They go on to tell of the resurrection of Christ. This last event...differs from the preceding ones because it is much more difficult to say what the historical fact was." Whatever those facts may be, as MacQuarrie notes, "it does seem quite certain that there never would have been any rise of the people of God [i.e. Christians] if that people has not been convinced that Jesus was risen."

Now as ever, then, and maybe especially in this age of fact-checking for accuracy, Christians carry with them the responsibility to answer the question when it arises: 'If your religion is based on it, then is it not necessary for you to know with certainty that this fellow Jesus was raised from death? So, how can you know?' How can we know that 'Christ is Risen!' is a statement of truth? Thirteenth century scholar and theologian Thomas Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica* at Question XVI 'On Truth' writes that "Truth is the equation of thought and thing." He means that the measure of the truth of something, like the proposition that Christ is risen, is discernable by comparing what we think the thing is with the thing itself. To the degree that you or I can recognize the thing as consonant with what we understand the thing to be, we can confidently believe both our understanding of it and the thing itself to be true.

It may sound like mere intellectual gamesmanship or rhetoric, but his insight is more. For one thing, it reminds that that which is credibly held to be true far exceeds only those things that are observable. For instance, as he notes, the rocks that are buried deep within the earth are no less truly rocks simply because we are not able to see them or touch them and know them truly to be rocks. Truth is not based solely upon humanity's ability to observe it. Truth is also found in the congruence of what we are able to think about a thing compared with what we know and experience of the thing itself. Returning to the example of the rocks, what you and I know of them, including that people find them buried in the

ground, rightly leads us to conclude intellectually that there are rocks buried deep in the earth and that they are truly rocks even though they may remain forever unseen.

Regarding Jesus' resurrection, then, are we able to know that the declaration that 'Christ is Risen' is a statement of truth? If so, how? And yes, we may rightly concur that this statement is indeed the basis of our religion and of our relationship with God. And if we are able to know the truth of the statement, then we are able to help others to know it, too.

We can agree with the reasonable observation that MacQuarrie offers, namely: that the phenomenon of the Church itself, of its rise and quick growth in the early centuries of its existence and of the persistence of its existence for these 2000 years or so, offer evidence that something substantial did in fact occur to give it birth. Something more than the hopefulness of the early followers of Jesus, more than their experience of the wonder of his teachings in their relationships with one another, occurred to propagate and sustain the Church in its infancy. A sufficient number and variety of credible people told enough other credible and thoughtful people, that they had encountered materially the risen Jesus, so that people were persuaded that Christ had in fact risen, even though they had not observed him risen themselves.

Yet, it was not merely the intellectual exercise of the measure of the truthfulness of their statements that discerns the truth of Christ's resurrection. It is also the consonance between what they experience in the Church, in the relationships that they observe and experience among the people of God, that further persuades people of the truth of the statement that Christ is Risen. It is, I suggest, this confluence between what we are taught in scripture and the study thereof with what we experience with one another as fellow followers of Jesus that convinces us today Christ is indeed risen.

Can you or I point to a photograph of Christ's risen self? Of course not. But, if photography had existed at the time, would such a photograph be enough to persuade anyone of the truth of Christ's resurrection? Maybe, just maybe, and even then, only for a time. Only until the person had sufficient time to measure the evidence of the photograph with the evidence of the people who identified themselves with the claim supported by it, that Christ is risen. Did the people then or do the people now who identify with Christ risen manifest the truth of the claim? If their manner of life contradicts the claim, then the photographic evidence would cease to persuade. It would be disproved as a fake, or at least its

fakery would be believed in religiously, awaiting a future proof of its fraudulence. And all because of the dissonance between the intellectual claim and the experience of the credibility of those propagating it.

This means that you and I, also, know the truth of the claim that Christ is risen primarily because we have experienced and observed the equation of the intellectual credibility of the claim itself with the credibility of the behavior and integrity of those making the claim. The affect of the examples of their lives upon our own combined and consonant with the witness of scripture and the traditions of the Church convince us of the truth that Christ is indeed risen. Likewise, this combination of the reasonable claim of the resurrection of Jesus in scripture and tradition along with your example, mine, ours together in this community of ECR as a whole, not only persuades but convinces others around us that Christ is risen indeed.

The combination of reverence for this truth and lively celebration of it here at ECR lends weight to the truth that Jesus is risen and alive, and is especially so here at ECR. The truth matters to people, and this is truth that matters to people more than most statements of truth. Live the Easter life here, and invite a friend or neighbor to join and do the same. You can do this, and so can I. All of us can. Because here at ECR, Christ's resurrection is more than a day, more than a season; it is the truth of our way of life. Because we know that people need to experience this. Because we know that they need to be here to experience this for themselves. And because we know that they need you and I here with them to make this happen. Christ is risen here, indeed!

God's Peace.

*Jim +*