

Seeing is Believing—or is it?



Easter can be described as a celebration of an event about people seeing and not seeing, believing and not believing. When our sight is not perfect, glasses can transform what we see. Also, if we have cataracts removed from our eyes, we may be surprised to discover what is actually around us!

Each Gospel in the New Testament presents the story of Jesus' resurrection a little differently. In Matthew's Gospel (28:1-10), set for Easter Day this year, we read how Mary Magdalene and "the other Mary" witnessed an earthquake, and saw the stone that had closed the tomb being rolled back by an angel who told them that Jesus' body was no longer there. They were invited by the angel to see that the tomb was empty, and instructed to go and tell Jesus's disciples that Jesus had been raised from the dead and would meet them in Galilee.

These same women, who because they were women were usually regarded as unimportant in their culture, had already witnessed Jesus being nailed to the cross, crying out to God who seemed to have abandoned him, and dying. They also saw Joseph placing Jesus' body in a tomb and closing it with a large stone (Matthew 27:59-60).

Hurrying off to the disciples, the women had the joy of meeting the risen Jesus himself, the first people to do so. Jesus greeted them and repeated the words of the angel directing them to tell the disciples he had risen. They recognised Jesus immediately, held his feet and worshiped him. They knew he was real and

not a ghost, but was Divine. The women experienced both fear and joy, but did not hesitate to obey the instructions given to them by the angel.

In contrast, the Roman guards, placed at the tomb by the Pharisees and chief priests to prevent any removal of Jesus' body, also witnessed the earthquake, saw the angel, the stone rolled back and the empty tomb. They were terrified, but felt no joy. Some of them went into Jerusalem to tell the chief priests what they had seen. Eventually the guards were bribed to say that Jesus' disciples came by night and stole his body from the tomb (Matthew 28:11-15). The guards saw the same things as the women, but responded differently.

Similar stories of the risen Jesus to those in Matthew's Gospel are found in John's Gospel, as well as extra ones. One of these extra ones involved Thomas. Thomas had not been with the other disciples when Jesus first appeared to them. He declared he could not believe that Jesus was alive unless he saw and touched the nail holes in his hands and the wound in his side. Jesus' body was important for him. A week later Thomas did see Jesus and was invited by him to touch his wounds. We are not told whether Thomas did touch or not, only that he then believed (John 20:28).

What has all this to say to us? We have not seen the risen Jesus, so why do we believe in Jesus' resurrection, or do we? Perhaps we believe because as a baby, our god-parents, parents and other members of the Church affirmed their faith in Jesus' resurrection on our behalf at our baptism, and demonstrated it in their lives. Later we may have been told about Jesus rising from the dead, and believed for ourselves. But for each of us as Christians, there needs to be more. Our faith should be always growing, because although we have not seen Jesus we can know and experience his presence in our lives and the lives of others. This may be especially true when we have lived through grief, pain or loneliness.

At such times, we may have had moments when we felt no belief in God, and only an emptiness or abandonment. We had a choice to persevere regardless like Jesus, or to give up. The care and love shown to us by other people may have helped us to keep going and believe. On later reflection, perhaps we saw or recognised God present in the kind deeds of others at that time.

Some people believe in God's goodness and love although they do not know it,

or have faith in the risen Jesus. They appreciate the love they receive from, and give to others, and find meaning in their lives from such relationships.

Returning to the story of Thomas, Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." (John 20:29). We today can rejoice in our belief in the risen Jesus who loves us and whom we know and love.

Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, out of love for Jesus, witnessed to and shared in the pain and grief of Jesus' death. They also witnessed and shared in the joy of Jesus' bodily resurrection. What they saw and then believed, changed their lives.

We have not seen the risen Jesus, but we can see in the lives of others and show in our own lives, something of Jesus' resurrection life. I suggest, *we see because we believe* - our faith changes our lives.

Can we, out of love, in our acts, words and *very being*, not only share in the pain of others, but also share with others the joy of seeing and believing in the risen Jesus?

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