

Easter Sunday 2021

What difference does it make to you that Jesus rose from the dead? How are you living your life differently because you believe that Jesus suffered died and rose again? St. Paul in the letter to the Colossians makes clear how he expected the early Christians to live: "Brothers and sisters: If you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." Wow, St. Paul makes a point that maybe it can be easy for us to miss. If we believe that Christ is risen, then we are raised with him. If we are raised with him then everything changes. Everything Changes, our minds are not focused here, our minds set on what is above. In other words, he not only rose from the dead he also ascended to the Father and us together with him.

Think about the experience of living with a pandemic for over a year now. People are beginning to think that maybe we can do things differently than we have in the past. During the shutdown last year, we had to start livestreaming Masses almost overnight. Livestreaming our Masses will continue to be important for people who are shut-in or sick beyond the pandemic. Some meetings on zoom might continue. I have noticed that some evening meetings at the parish are better now. Everyone is on time, we are more efficient and we get the same work done. Sometimes it is less stressful for volunteers to be able to stay in the comfort of their home instead of having to drive to the parish after a long day of work. People on various fronts are saying that the pandemic has changed us. Things will not be the same as before.

What does it mean for us that everything has changed with Christ's resurrection? When we read the resurrection accounts in the gospels, the disciples grappled with living into a new normal. Everything changed and in much more dramatic way than the pandemic. What do I mean? Jesus, is different than any great prophet or teacher who came before him or who has come since. We hear it in St. Peter's preaching in the Acts of the Apostle. This Jesus, who went about doing good, they put him to death by hanging him on a tree. This man God raised from the dead on the third day, and we ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He appeared not all but to us and he commissioned us to testify that is judge of both the living and the dead. Now that might seem like a made-up story and many who heard Peter and the apostles preach, but many also believed. What made it even more believable is that all the apostles, with the exception of

John, died a martyr's death preaching the Gospel of Jesus. From there, the Church grew even more. There are religious leaders who have died for something that was false. That is where it ended. In those cases when the leader dies, then that religious group dies out with him. Not with Jesus. He lives even in death and people who encountered his resurrected presence were willing to die for him because they knew that those who die in him will live forever.

Once someone has a personal encounter with Jesus the Risen Lord, everything changes. When St. Paul encountered the risen Lord he gave up killing Christians and became one of the greatest preachers of the Gospel and was stoned to death for Christ. Countless people throughout the centuries encountered Christ and died to their former way of life, like St. Ignatius of Loyola who as a soldier had his leg severely damaged by a cannon ball. While recovering, he encountered Christ. He later wrote, "It matters not if I am rich or if I am poor, if I have good health or poor health, if I have a long life or a short life." (St. Ignatius of Loyola was the founder of the Jesuits, Gonzaga is a Jesuit school. Go Zags!) But, even if they lose, we look to things that are above, where Christ is seated at God's right hand.

An encounter with Christ is possible for anyone and can come unexpectedly. A woman shared with me that she encountered Christ at the Mass on Holy Thursday and was overwhelmed with emotion. I encountered Christ as a teenager while hiking in the woods, which led me to become a priest. I am sure that if I asked, we would hear multiple stories of how people have encountered the Risen Lord. We cannot force it to happen, but we can ask for the Lord to come into our heart in a new way. Jesus the Risen Lord is alive and when experience him personally, that makes all the difference.