

We live in the light of Resurrection

Would you go to a movie called "The Resurrection of the Christ"?

If not, why not? Does the topic sound boring? What's there to watch, after all, in the Resurrection? No angry screaming, no blood, no violence.

Yet the Resurrection is what makes us Christians. Our Gospels are about the good news of God's saving gift to us in Christ. Each of the four Gospels follows the Passion narrative with vivid dramatizations of the Risen Christ's appearances to his beloved disciples. He calms their fears, he sends them forth as a blessed community — to lay healing hands on the world's ills, to cast out evil, to witness to God's reconciling life in his name. As Christians, we are an Easter people. We live in the

light of the Resurrection.

So we have to wonder: Why do we flock to violent films? Do we really need more images of the horrible things that we humans do to one another? Christ came to free us from exactly these horrors: from our entrapment in mutual hatreds, our scapegoating of groups whom we define as the enemy, our dreadful penchant for making victims.

Don't we need, instead, to see some images of how Christ has freed us? In Christ all the brokenness of our human communities has been made whole. "He is our peace," says the Letter to the Ephesians. In his very flesh, "he has reconciled us all to God in one body through his cross, which put our former enmity to death." (Eph. 2:13-16)

I'm not a filmmaker, but my guess is that making a movie with this message would be quite daunting. How would a filmmaker portray Christ putting our former enmity to death? What images and scenes, what characters and plot, would convey the meaning of the Resurrection? By comparison, presenting the Passion narrative is fairly simple; nothing is easier than to horrify us with images of graphic violence. But the real creative challenge would be to bring alive the core Gospel message that Christ is risen.

What's so challenging is this: The story of the Resurrection of Christ isn't confined to the Gospel narratives.

Those narratives are its beginning, and they're wonderful, rich in human drama and divine comedy. There's Mary Magdalene's dismay at finding Jesus' tomb empty, her anguished weeping that she can't properly bury his body, and her astonished joy when she recognizes that Jesus himself is right there speaking to her from beyond the grave, in the form of the gardener. There's the tension when the other disciples, hidden fearfully away in a room, don't believe the women's report that Jesus is alive. There's Thomas's need to touch Jesus' wounds in order to believe that he has truly died and risen. There's the delightful scene of Jesus teasing Cleopas and a companion on the road to Emmaus, waiting until a key moment to reveal his identity to them. And, again, his fun with the disciples who are fishing unsuccessfully in the Sea of Tiberius, when Jesus points them to a marvelous catch, at which they recognize him and Peter jumps into the water for joy. Through all these scenes of the disciples' encounters with the Risen Christ, certain motifs recur: Jesus' play with disguise, his delight in surprising his followers, their swayings between doubt and belief, the very natural human disagreements among them about what on earth is going on in these startling unprecedented appearances of their Lord.



Mike Crupi/Catholic Courier

Peggy Rosenthal.

Finally, there are the magnificent scenes in which — despite their ongoing confusion about how he can indeed be alive, and what exactly he is asking of them — Jesus commissions his followers to go forth in his name: to baptize, to heal, to witness that he is with us until the end of time.

But these episodes, though coming at the end of the Gospels, are not the end of the story of Christ's Resurrection. They are its beginning. This story is still in its making, and we ourselves are among the characters. A film entitled "The Resurrection of the Christ" needs to fold us into the story, dramatizing the Risen Christ's ongoing life in the people who are called by his name.

Can I say precisely how a great filmmaker will manage to tell this best of all stories, and to keep us gripped, our eyes riveted to the screen? No. But I have confidence that it can be done, and brilliantly. The imaginative creativity of artists, in whatever medium, is a gift that God always provides for us.

All I know is that this film will not be R-rated. Unless "R" is for Resurrection.

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