

EASTER

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"Jesus links faith in the resurrection to his own person," section 994 of the catechism states, citing Jesus' declaration "I am the resurrection and the life."

The Resurrection of Christ paved the way for the resurrection of all who have died, the catechism states. "We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives forever, so after death the righteous will live forever with the risen Christ, and he will raise them up on the last day" (989).

FAITH MATTERS

Sister Hawkins and biblical studies professor Father Sebastian Falcone, her colleague at St. Bernard's, noted this crucial distinction between the Resurrection and the Crucifixion: A nonbeliever can conclude that a Jewish prophet named Jesus was killed. Only a believer can accept that he was resurrected.

"The Passion story deals with ascertainable, historical material," Father Falcone said. "You can see when a man is captured, punished, brought to a cross and buried."

On the other hand, Father Falcone noted, the belief that Jesus rose from the dead is based on the testimony of the women and men who claimed to have seen him alive after his burial. Even though no one saw the Resurrection as it happened, it is unlikely that the disciples were victims of delusion, he said, since a number of people reported varying experiences of the risen Jesus. These people also preached his Resurrection in the years to come, he said, adding that oral accounts of the Resurrection pre-date the writing of the Gospels.

In the end, however, a Christian must come to believe in the Resurrection through faith, he noted.

"If you're really looking for direct, empiric proof, you're not going to find it," he said.

Indeed, it seems as if Jesus may have wanted people to believe in the Resurrection through faith, Father Falcone said. To buttress his point, he noted that women in Jesus' time were not considered reliable witnesses in courts of law, yet Mary Magdalene became the first witness to the risen Christ. In this fact, the priest said he sees Jesus inviting a response of believing in his word, rather than in an elaborate structure of arguments.

Sister Hawkins said it is better that there are no records of someone having actually witnessed the Resurrection.

"If somebody was there, I'm sure we would use it to our benefit, and



The empty tomb signifies Jesus' Resurrection.

we would sell tickets to the tomb," she said. "We would turn it into our moment, and possibly really miss what happened."

The Resurrection is a mystery, she said. "You don't solve mysteries, you live them."

For Sister Hawkins, the mystery of the Resurrection includes the belief that light will always triumph over darkness, noting the poignancy of such a message in today's tumultuous world.

"If this world ever needed this message that the light is greater than the darkness, it's now," she said.

Father Falcone noted that the Resurrection affirms God's love for us.

"(The Resurrection) speaks to us in terms of the most precious thing we have, that our created identity will never lapse back into nothingness," he said. "The Resurrection continues to be the sign and the seal of the assurance of God's commitment to keeping individuals in existence for eternity, that what God has done has not been done in vain."

TEACHING, PREACHING

The Easter story promises real hope for the many people who lack it today, observed Irene Goodwin, pastoral administrator of St. Mary of the Assumption Parish in Scottsville. For that reason, she said, "when we tell the story of the Resurrection to children, teens or adults, we need to tell it with passion — tell it like we believe it."

"Christ's Resurrection reminds us that there is more than today," she added. "When we see or hear of a great love it gives us all hope. The Resurrection story is a story of great love. To know that we are loved to that extent brings us hope and faith."

Teaching the Resurrection also requires different approaches for different ages, according to Sister Di-

etz. In explaining Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter to children, for example, a catechist might liken what happened to Jesus to the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. Talking to adults requires a different approach, she said, noting that appeals to the heart, rather than to the mind, work best. Most people, she said, believe that death is not the end of the story for their deceased loved ones.

"Somewhere in their gut or their heart, they know that their loved one is OK," she said.

Even the authors of the catechism acknowledge they haven't figured out what it means to rise with Christ, she noted.

"When we say that we'll receive a new body, we don't know what that means," Sister Dietz said. At one time, Catholics shunned cremation because of their belief in the corporeal resurrection. However, the church has come to believe that

"God is not going to need our body to resurrect us," so the bodies of Catholics now can be cremated or donated for scientific research and organ replacement, she noted.

Given the mystery surrounding the Resurrection, how does one preach about it? Father Robert Ring, pastor of the six-church Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Community in the Finger Lakes, answered simply: "The tomb is empty! God loves us more than we can imagine. Embracing his cross, Jesus paved a way to new life that can never be explained, only celebrated, tasted and relished."

Father Ring said he reflects on how the story of the Resurrection connects with that of his own community, which every year loses some members and gains new ones.

"Where has the community experienced death?" he asks. "What are we mourning? Where is the gift of new life breaking in?"

MISSION NEWS

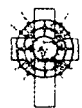


"The help received from the Propagation of the Faith is literally our 'lifeline,'" says one seminary rector in India. Although the seminarians grow most of their own food and their parents are able to offer some financial assistance, these students would not be able to prepare to serve their

people as priests without help offered through the Propagation of the Faith. "Daily the seminarians pray for the great sacrifices made for them," says another rector in that country. "We continue to ask God to bless you and the important contribution you make toward the Church in India."

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