

[Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Ps. 118; Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor. 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9]

Did Jesus know that He would rise from the dead in three days?

Both Matthew and Luke report that on three separate occasions Jesus told His apostles He would be put to death and rise on the third day (see Mt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Lk 9:22; 18:33; 24:6-7).

At first glance these words seem to make Jesus' acceptance of death rather simple: "Yes, I'll die a cruel death, but in three days I'll be alive again." But Jesus made this prediction for the encouragement of the apostles, as He did in the Transfiguration. Even if throughout His Passion, Our Lord had remembered He would rise, that memory would not have lessened the agony He endured in scourging and Crucifixion. His agony was unique. He suffered as no other human being ever has or ever can suffer.

As fully man and fully God, Jesus suffered the agony. Perfectly innocent, fully human, fully divine, Our Lord plumbed depths of suffering no human being can even approach.

Have you ever wondered what it was like for the first disciples to see Jesus in the light of the Resurrection?

Imagine being inside a dimly lit, windowless room and then suddenly walking outside into the brightest part of the day. The sunlight is all around you; everything is bright. By reflex, you close your eyes to protect them. You try squinting, maybe even using your hand as a visor to cast a little shadow on your now teary, hypersensitive eyes. You may see a blurry figure here and another there, but you can't focus or gaze at anything. You alternate between blindness and misperception.

From the Gospel testimonies, the first disciples' experience of seeing the Risen Christ was pretty much like this. In fact, it would be better to call it "unseeing." John and Luke especially are keen on establishing this. Consider these four episodes:

Mary Magdalene at the tomb on Easter morning: "[Mary] turned around and saw Jesus there, but did not know it was Jesus" (Jn 20:14).

On the Sea of Tiberius: “When it was already dawn, Jesus was standing on the shore; but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus” (Jn 21:4).

On the road to Emmaus: “Jesus himself drew near and walked with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing him” (Lk 24:15-16).

In the Upper Room: “[H]e stood in their midst ... But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost” (Lk 24:36-37).

Every time the Risen Christ appears to his disciples, they cannot see Him, even when they see something. But in each instance, a change occurs, and they suddenly see.

We might be tempted to think that something about Jesus suddenly changes so He becomes recognizable, but in fact the Gospels attest something else. It is the disciples who move -- or rather, they are moved.

Yes, Jesus acts in each instance to bring about the change, but what unlocks vision and moves the disciples from a place of unseeing to a place of seeing and recognition is a change within themselves: Mary hears Jesus call her name. The seafaring disciples receive their calling again in the same way they had before. On the way to Emmaus, Jesus teaches the disciples the Scriptures before feeding them with the bread He blesses and breaks. In the Upper Room, Jesus gives peace and shows His wounds and forgives and commissions them. With each of these actions, it is as if the disciples' eyes grow accustomed to the light of day, and they see.

As they become capable of seeing, the disciples no longer are limited by what they wanted to see or what their dim expectations had prepared them to see -- now, they see Jesus as He is, in all his glory. They change; Jesus is the one who changes them. St. Thomas captures what each of them has come to see in their various encounters: that Jesus is “my Lord and my God” (Jn 20:28). Not only do they SEE Him, but they also become His witnesses. They tell others who He is.

Easter is the time to become witnesses. For disciples today, being changed into a witness is no less demanding or dramatic than it was for those

first disciples. It requires a change in vision, moving past dim expectations, becoming accustomed to Christ's light.

This is painful at first -- in fact, it has to be. We grow comfortable with wanting too little, and we confine ourselves to our own preferred ways of seeing things, which is like being holed up in a windowless room where we don't realize how dark it is until we walk out into the light of day. To become witnesses means being shocked into seeing the dazzling beauty of Christ and proclaiming to others both what we have seen and how we see in this new light.

At Easter, how do you tell others that you have glimpsed what matters most and that this has affected the way you see everything? That's what it means to become a witness to Christ, who is himself the light by which disciples see. The way to learn how to do this is not to try to do everything all at once.

Instead, we learn this craft of witnessing to the grace of Christ in our lives the way we learn everything else: by practicing small, basic skills to which we grow more accustomed. For disciples to become witnesses, this means practicing the skills of storytelling, and to make our storytelling about encounters with grace. Start with your Easter meal and go from there.

The Catholic writer and speaker Matthew Kelly has recently published a book about why he and others love being a Catholic, which we present to you as an Easter gift. He asked his contributing writers three questions, which he compiled in this book, and which I share with you as you reflect on what being a Catholic means to you. Here they are:

Why do YOU love being Catholic?

What is your favorite memory as a Catholic?

As a Catholic, what are your hopes for the future?

God loves new beginnings. He wants to give you a fresh start. Let Jesus resurrect you this Easter season. May you be filled with His Joy.

AMEN AND ALLELUIA!