

Where is He? -- The Great Cliffhanger

Easter Sunday

Acts of the Apostles 10:34a, 37-43
Psalm 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23

Colossians 3:1-4
John 20:1-9

After spending what is traditionally regarded as a three-year ministry in which He preached a daring message, performed stunning miracles in which He cured the sick, transformed water into wine, multiplied loaves and fishes, expelled demons, liberated the sinful and raised the dead; after being transfigured before three of His closest associates, challenging and antagonizing the self-righteous to no end while lifting up the downtrodden with His message of hope; after surrendering Himself to betrayal by a friend, condemnation by his people, and ultimately to death at the hands of foreign oppressors, Jesus of Nazareth performed the most daring, most unexpected act of His entire ministry . . . He disappeared!



Of the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, not one gives a firsthand account of Jesus rising from the dead and emerging from the tomb. The closest we get (while still missing it completely) is the account in Matthew where the women, upon approaching the tomb, experience an earthquake, then see the angel descending, pushing back the stone and resting upon it. When they rush forward to look inside, however, He is gone (Matt 28:1-6). The other three Gospels tell simply of the tomb being found empty and an

angelic being reminding them of Jesus' promise.

Even the Gospel stories of Jesus' post Resurrection appearances are products of testimony from only a handful of disciples. For the majority of those who personally knew Jesus, the last image they had was of their "messiah" being led away under arrest, or dead on the Cross. Regarding the Resurrection, however, all that is left to us is the empty tomb, a reminder by angelic beings, and the

testimony of a chosen few that they had *seen* Him in His risen glory

In the end, this is all we have, the Empty Tomb, and an angelic reminder of Christ's promise. It is as if the sacred authors are looking at us and asking, "what

do *you* think happened to Him?". On Easter Sunday, our highest holy day of the year, we celebrate a great cliffhanger, when Jesus was nowhere to be found.

Our response to this disappearance is outlined in the writing of the letter to the Colossians, when Paul speaks of our own resurrection with Christ. Paul speaks of this resurrection with Christ in the *present* tense, rather than the future. He teaches us that in believing that Jesus has Risen from the Dead, we believe that we too have been raised. Therefore, we believe that we will one day appear with Christ in glory. In the letter to the Romans, Paul links this death

The Resurrection

and resurrection with Christ to the Sacrament of Baptism, celebrated each year during the Easter Vigil, in which we do not enter into our Easter festivities before we have first received in Baptism the new members of our faith community.

Therefore, how we respond to this great cliffhanger? How do we live as children of the Resurrection? How does the manner in which we live our lives manifest the level of faith we have in the Resurrection of Jesus? Where do we focus our priorities, our values and our lives as people of the Resurrection? What kind of people ought we to be if we have been raised with Christ

and await the Kingdom where we will be glorified with Him?

As Church, we celebrate the great event of Christ's Resurrection, not as a mystery to be solved, but as the central event of our salvation. We profess our faith in the testimony of those who have told us they have seen Him, and we believe in the testimony that has been handed down to us by the Church. We celebrate every Easter, indeed every Sunday, that great event which, for us, is not a cliffhanger, but a fulfillment.

Fr. Bill Nicholas
March 29, 2013

