

Easter 2C

During excavations in Egypt during the 1920's, archaeologists found a handful of wheat roughly 5000 years old in a tomb belonging to one of its ancient Kings. Someone decided to sow the ancient grains and, to their amazement, they grew.

Our faith in the Resurrection will be like those dormant grains unless we believe that Jesus is present with us as a real living person. Even though we don't see him in the flesh. He touches my life in the here and now with His reassuring presence especially in the Mass and the sacraments.

There is an old French proverb which says: 'God often visits us but mostly we're not at home' - like doubting Thomas. We're 'not at home' if our faith in Him is merely academic – all head and no heart. We're not 'at home' if we believe that science has the answer to everything. That doesn't at all mean the Church is anti-science as some make out. The first Observatory in the world, for instance, was in the Vatican. The first Universities in Europe which were, of course, founded by the Catholic Church, included faculties on natural philosophy and physics. If the church was anti-science, as some academics make out, those faculties would not have been included. I know the church censured Galileo but it wasn't because the Church discounted his theory that the Earth circled the Sun, as some make out, but because they wanted him to treat it as a hypothesis rather than the irrefutable truth, but he wouldn't listen. That was the nub of the problem. We might call it 'a breakdown in communication. The Protestant Church at the time actually condemned his theory as anti-scriptural. That's what happens when the bible is interpreted too literally. If the Bible says that Samson killed ten thousand men with the jawbone of an ass, then he did - no ifs, no buts. Bizarre.

Thomas would not believe that Jesus had risen until he'd seen Him in the flesh. But Jesus gently tells him: 'blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe'. Well, that includes us.

The resurrection has more to do with transformation of the inner man or woman than seeing Jesus in the flesh. It is interesting to note that on the four or five occasions when He appeared to the disciples after the Resurrection, facial recognition wasn't high on His agenda. Mary Magdalene thought he was the gardener, the apostles thought he was a ghost. If Jesus in the flesh were to walk into this church right now, after the dust had settled, would there be any guarantee that we would go out and live better lives on the strength of it? I doubt it. The words of Jesus recorded in Scripture are far more important than glimpsing Jesus in the flesh. In John chapter six Jesus says: 'the words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life'. In the same gospel Jesus is described as 'the Word made flesh'. When, through the power of the Spirit, His words become fleshed out, as it were, in us, then the power of Christ's resurrection will indeed shine through our words and actions. We will be, as St Augustine says, Easter People - not just in name but also in fact.

The doctrine of the resurrection is the firm bed-rock on which our faith is built. Tamper with that and we shake its very foundations. St Paul reminds us that 'if Christ is not risen then all our believing comes to nothing'.

The Church wasn't built on 'doubting Thomases' but on the unshakable belief that Jesus rose from the dead in his human body and is sacramentally with us in the church until the end of time, like He said He would.