

EASTER 3C

For his seventh birthday, his father buys his young son a new bike and a book of instructions, complete with diagrams on how to ride it. The father insists that the boy read the book cover to cover, study it in great detail, memorise passages from it and pass a written test before he can even take his bike out of the shed. But we know that the only way to learn how to ride a bike is actually get up on it, fall off it a few times and learn from our mistakes.

It's the same with spiritual realities. You often hear of people who enjoy reading love stories but leave a lot to be desired when it comes to translating this precious commodity into action. It's the same with the Resurrection of Christ. It is only meaningful if my life has been touched in some way by His reassuring presence. Otherwise, it's little more than book knowledge.

To whom did our Lord appear after His Resurrection? It seems to me that Jesus only appeared to those who held a special place for him in their hearts. He didn't appear to the faithless or those who disowned Him.

For instance in today's gospel, as dawn broke, John, known as the beloved disciple, was the first to recognise Jesus as he stood on the lake shore. The others thought he was a ghost. If you remember He was the one who reclined closest to Him at the Last Supper and was described as the one Jesus loved. But when the going got tough He proved his loyalty to Jesus by braving the hostile crowd and standing beneath the Cross.

After he rose, Mary Magdalene recognised Him only when He addressed her endearingly as Mary. She had already washed his feet with her tears in Simon's house and again we're not surprised to find her standing by the one she loved at the foot of the cross.

We don't find him appearing to total strangers at any time during those 40 days after His Resurrection. But what about us in the church. St Pauls spells it out in his letter to the Ephesians: *'as part of God's household there is no reason whatsoever for us to behave like strangers or aliens in his presence'*.

The Church refers to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. In everyday life, the people who are really present to us are those with whom we recognise as friends or kindred spirits even though they may live at the other side of the world. We are oftentimes more present to them than even our next door neighbour.

Physical proximity does not automatically lead to genuine closeness. You could live with someone for years and not really know them. There were many who knew Jesus in the flesh and even witnessed His miracles but who still kept their distance. Were they just His fans rather than His followers? A relationship with Him involves taking His words to heart and standing by Him in all of life's circumstances.

The church teaches that Christ is really, truly and substantially present in the Eucharist. It is in Holy Communion that our lives and His intertwine preparing us on earth for that endless union with Him in the world to come.