

Easter 3C

John is seven years old. For his birthday, his father buys him 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 exam before he can even take his bike out of the shed. This seems ludicrous because we know that the only way to learn how to ride a bike is actually get up on it and learn through trial and error.

It's the same with spiritual realities. You often hear of people who are hooked on reading love stories whilst at the same time leaving a lot to be desired which it comes to actual loving others in their own personal lives. We learn how to love by loving and being loved. It's the same with the Resurrection of Christ. It is only meaningful if my life has been touched in some way by His loving presence in the here and now. Otherwise, the resurrection is mere academic knowledge.

To whom did our Lord appear after His Resurrection? With the exception of Saul of Tarsus, it seems to me that Jesus only appeared to those who held a special place for him in their hearts.

For instance Jesus appeared to John, the beloved disciple. He was the one who sat next to Jesus at the last supper and faithfully stood by him at the foot of the Cross. Mary Magdalene recognised Him only when He addressed her affectionately as Mary. Initially she thought he might be the gardener. She had already washed his feet with her tears and was present on Calvary where she shed more tears. And again it was only when the Emmaus disciples invited Jesus to share their hospitality and table fellowship that they recognize who their treasured guest is. Notice how Jesus never appeared to Pilate or Herod or Caiphas who were openly hostile and rude towards Him.

The Church often refers to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. But what about our real presence to one another. In everyday life, the people who are really present to us are those who love and care about us. If a close friend or an affectionate family member contacts you from the other side of the world, you are more present to them than to most of your work colleagues or to the person who lives next door whom you rarely see. Distance or physical absence is no object to real presence. It's the same with Jesus - even though you don't see Him, you still feel close to Him, especially at Mass.

Physical proximity does not automatically lead to closeness. The prevalence of marital breakdown in our society bears ample testimony to this. Intimacy in marriage only comes about when there is real sharing of life and love and a genuine commitment to one's spouse. 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, turned down His call to discipleship. Judas was in the company of Jesus for three years but that didn't stop him at the end from betraying Him for thirty pieces of silver.

We see from the Scriptures that most of the post resurrection appearances of Jesus occur in the setting of a fraternal meal. One of the foremost ways we can be close to Our Lord is in the shared meal setting of the Eucharist where I become one with Him, and He with me.