

A Reflection for the Resurrection of the Lord

By James Martin, S.J.

Christ is risen!

What more can be said about Easter, other than those remarkable three words? Maybe it would help to, as spiritual directors like to say, “unpack” each word.

To talk about “Christ” means of course to talk about Jesus of Nazareth. The term *Christos* is the Greek word used in the New Testament for “Anointed One,” which refers to the long-awaited Messiah. These days “Christ” functions almost as a kind of “last name” for Jesus, but in fact it’s more of a theological title.

But it’s important to understand that the one who rose from the grave is the same person who was buried there: Jesus of Nazareth. Sometimes theologians separate the two terms, which can give people the impression that the “Jesus of History,” that is, the flesh-and-blood man who walked the dusty ground of Galilee and Judea in the first century, is somehow different than the “Christ of Faith,” the one who has risen from the dead, is alive to us in the Spirit and who now leads the church.

The Risen Christ, however, was recognizably and identifiably the man called Jesus of Nazareth. He was the same person the disciples had followed during his public ministry, had seen die a horrible death on the Cross and then was sealed away in his tomb. As Stanley Marrow, S.J., a New Testament scholar, wrote in his commentary on the Gospel of John, “For him to have risen as anyone other than the Jesus of Nazareth they knew would void the Resurrection of all its meaning.” This is one reason why Jesus shows his wounds to his disciples in some of the post-Resurrection appearances. The same one who died on the Cross rose from the dead. The marks of his suffering are, as Father Marrow says in a memorable phrase, his “credentials.”

And Jesus Christ did not simply rise from the dead on Easter Sunday, upending all of human history—he is risen. Notice that this glorious Easter acclamation is the present tense. We don’t say “Christ rose!” Or “Christ did rise!” We say, more triumphantly, “Christ is risen!” He has destroyed death forever, and is alive, present through the Holy Spirit. He is risen, from now until the end of time. What happened in the past—his Resurrection—is also a present-day and future event.

Finally, let’s consider that beautiful word “risen.” In English, the word conjures up images of spring flowers rising from the cold, hard, dead winter soil. A perfect image for faith during difficult times.

Imagine the disciples cowering behind closed doors on Good Friday and Holy Saturday, after the Crucifixion. They were convinced that everything was over. They were sure that the great ministry, the great project, of Jesus had ended. They were certain that all was lost. They were, in a word, stuck in despair.

But they had forgotten that with Jesus, suffering never has the last word. The disciples failed to remember the message of the Angel to Mary at the Annunciation, which is the message of Easter: Nothing is impossible with God! That is true in the past, present and future.

Christ is risen! That means everything has changed, now and forever.

Happy Easter!



Mary of Magdala stayed outside near the empty tomb, weeping, then she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, though she did not recognise him. Supposing him to be the gardener, she said 'Sir, if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him'. Jesus said, 'Mary!' She knew him then (John 20:11-15)