

Three people figure prominently in the Easter gospel story according to St. John; Mary Magdalene, Peter and the “Beloved Disciple” traditionally associated with John but unnamed so as to allow us to assume his place in the Jesus story. We are told that on Easter Sunday morning all three came to the tomb. However, each “saw” and reacted differently to what they found. Mary Magdalene figured grave robbers had stolen the body of Jesus and ran to inform the disciples of her discovery. Peter and the Beloved Disciple arrive and see what Mary saw but react differently. Peter enters the tomb but nothing is noted of his reaction. We can presume it was, like that of Mary, confusion. The Beloved Disciple on the other hand “entered into the tomb, saw and believed” (Jn. 20:1-9). What is going on here and what does it mean for us?

All of the Gospel accounts assure us that, like his birth, the resurrection of Jesus was a physical, real event, not just some alteration inside the consciousness of believers. After the resurrection, we are assured, Jesus’ tomb was empty, people could touch him, he ate food with them, he was not a ghost.

Jesus’ rising from the dead was not a brute slap in the face of his critics, a non-negotiable fact that left skeptics with nothing to say. The resurrection did not make a big splash. It was not some spectacular event that exploded on the world scene and became the lead story on the evening news. It had the same dynamics as his human birth: After the resurrection Jesus was seen by some, but not by others; understood by some, but not by others. Some got his meaning and it changed their lives, others were indifferent to him, and still others understood what had happened, hardened their hearts against it, and tried to destroy its truth.

The key is “seeing”; a synonym for faith. Mary Magdalene and Peter at this early stage have an incomplete faith. Both had “seen” Jesus in his earthly life, had physically spent time with him, but had not yet fully entered into relationship with him. The

Beloved Disciple, on the other hand, “entered the tomb, saw and believed”. He made the leap of faith; fully opened his heart, not just his physical sight, to the person of Jesus; “entered” into a relationship of love with him, accepted his person, his word, his heart, and now “saw” the truth of Jesus, even though his physical body was no longer present in the way it had been before the events of Holy Week. The Beloved Disciple “saw and believed” that Jesus was truly alive through the Spirit which he had breathed upon all believers then and forever as he died on the cross. In this Spirit we, too, “entered into” Jesus through the sacrament of baptism and now are members of his “body” the Church, the sacrament of his on-going risen presence and activity in the world.

And this, as the saying goes, makes all the difference. For example: such “seeing” enables us to perceive in the re-awakening of the natural world around us this springtime a sign of Jesus’, and someday our own, rising from the dead. Recently, I had an encounter with a fellow believer, that upon reflection, was an experience of the Risen Jesus with me and my fellow believer like that of the disciples on the Emmaus Road on Easter night. My friend spent the better part of an evening at times tearfully sharing with me a personal story of brokenness, and despair. When all had finally been poured out, like a spring rain’s downpour, we sat in the silence that had settled between us. A profound peace filled the room. And, gradually, just as after a spring downpour the clouds part, the sun shines and a rainbow graces the sky, a face that earlier that was dark with trouble and pain assumed a countenance of peace, and a quiet sure smile broke forth. It was “entering in, seeing and believing”. The person and spirit of the Risen Jesus filled the room.

Today, may God grant each of us be the grace of the Beloved Disciple. May we enter into Jesus; “see and believe.”

Easter peace be yours.