

Along the track

Come and See

Every Easter our daily press contains a variety of articles about Jesus. Many of them contain the disclaimer: “I don’t believe myself” or “I am not a Christian”, “I admire people with faith but I just don’t believe”, “Church doesn’t happen in our family but we had to go to a wedding”. One acknowledged that he might annoy people who have a religious regard for Jesus but, as far as he was concerned, he was just a man, a good one nonetheless! Quite a number added the footnote: “apologies to any Christians who may be offended by this article”. So that makes it ok then?

Two thoughts come to mind – Jesus still challenges us, believers and non-believers alike. Despite being ‘non-believers’, Jesus just won’t go away. They are still intrigued by him. They still write about him, they are still curious or respectful of him – in the words of one writer: “He remains a force for goodness in the world”.

Two thousand years later, these Easter events are still news, they still claim attention. From whatever angle you take, Jesus was a remarkable person. He had no ulterior motives, no hidden agenda, no desire for personal wealth or fame or power. He didn’t have a power base, in fact quite the opposite – he identified with the poor, the powerless, the outcast, the downtrodden. He wasn’t vindictive – he wasn’t, in the words of one Easter writer “a superhero rising from the dead to overcome those who had destroyed him”. Jesus personified forgiveness, and that perhaps is the greatest challenge. His life was one of service, not just to the acceptable, the easy, but to those who were in prison and lonely and hungry, those scarred by leprosy, those disfigured, the lame and those troubled by demons, imaginary or otherwise.

Despite all the disclaimers Jesus is still a challenge. He is hard to ignore and in those who scoff and make fun, there is still respect, however grudging it may be. They still claim him. In the words of one writer: Because of Jesus, Good Friday is for every good-hearted person who has suffered. Many struggle with the central tenet of our faith, the resurrection. It is just too hard, too fanciful, too difficult to comprehend in a world where everything must have some rational or scientific explanation. The Afterlife can only be what we leave behind in our children and in the imprint we have left on our world rather than something that awaits us. But without the Resurrection, Jesus remains ‘a good man’, inspiring, authentic, committed, sincere, generous to a fault, courageous... but still a man.

In the words of Pope Francis, after the resurrection, Jesus told his disciples to go to Galilee, to the place where they were first called and there they would see him:

To return to Galilee means to re-read everything on the basis of the cross and its victory. To re-read everything – Jesus’ preaching, his miracles, the new community, the excitement and the defections, even the betrayal – to re-read everything starting from the end, which is a new beginning, from this supreme act of love.
(Easter Homily 2014)

We cannot understand Jesus or his mission without the Cross and the resurrection. Coming to understand what it means for us, for our Church, our world, for all people takes a lifetime journey of faith. It is hard to grasp why Jesus ‘had to die’, what the Resurrection actually means for our world and for each of us but it is worth the journey. If we look back over the past two thousand years we may discover that the Resurrection of Jesus means that things, no matter what, can always be new again. No life is unredeemable, no affliction unbearable or addiction incurable. Change is always possible. It’s never too late to start over. No sin is unforgivable. No betrayal is final. Goodness will always triumph no matter what defeats it may appear to suffer, that good people have a lasting impact, that our lives do make a difference. We may see that new life arises even from the greatest of tragedies, that suffering can have a purpose, a deeper meaning, that love will always overcome hatred and bigotry, that even in loss there is growth. The resurrection helps us make sense on life.

The second thought that arises from all these articles is that the sad truth is so often it is us that let Him down! It is the followers of Jesus that often give Him a bad name! So often people see just the divisions, the bickering not just between churches who follow Jesus but within them as well. They see the outward appearance of wealth and privilege, the pomp and ceremony, the abuse of power underlying sexual abuse scandal that has cut so deeply, rather than those who are dedicated to the service of others, those who quietly visit the sick, the lonely, those who work with the poor and disadvantaged.

So when people look at us, do they see what difference Jesus’ life and death and resurrection have made to us, in the way we live. At Eastertime, do we find ourselves with new hearts, new insights, greater sensitivity to those around us, especially those in need? Jesus has risen indeed and every year we have been asked to rise with him – that means a new way of being, a new way of seeing.

“Come and see!” In every human situation, marked by frailty, sin and death, the Good News is no mere matter of words, but a testimony to unconditional and faithful love: it is about leaving ourselves behind and encountering others, being close to those crushed by life’s troubles, sharing with the needy, standing at the side of the sick, elderly and the outcast... “Come and see!” Love is more powerful, love gives life, love makes hope blossom in the wilderness.

(Pope Francis Easter message 2014)

Regards
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