

## APPRECIATING THE APPEARANCES OF THE RISEN JESUS

### Easter Reflection 2021

Easter is not just a liturgical feast to be celebrated, it is a process meant to be entered into and lived. When Jesus told his disciples to take up their cross and follow him, he was inviting us to participate in his Paschal Mystery, involving his Passion, Death and Resurrection, the appearances to his disciples, his ascension into heaven, and the sending of the Spirit birthing the Church at Pentecost.

The most overlooked and least understood stage of this process is the appearances of Jesus, evident in that they are not mentioned in the glorious mysteries of the rosary or the creed, nor in Eucharistic canon. That is unfortunate, as the appearances of Jesus have much to teach us.

The scriptures tell us he spent forty days among them, talking to them about the kingdom of God (Acts 1:3), so living in the reign of God should also be our focus. I think Jesus was also teaching them to mourn and grieve his loss, as they could not have him back the way he was before – he had risen to a new kind of life, eternal life that he wants to share with us. That explains why he would tell Mary Magdalene “not to cling to him” as he had not yet ascended to the Father.

More particularly, the fact that no one recognized Jesus when he first appeared to them holds out another important lesson for us - the need to look more deeply to recognize him in the persons and events of our own daily lives, especially the poor.

Given the humility of our God who most often works in hidden and invisible ways, like yeast in dough, it is not surprising that God is most at home with the poor, the marginalized, the excluded. It is no accident that Jesus was born in a stable, and died between two criminals on a cross.

What a challenge it is for us to live this truth, tempted as we are to put our faith in possessions, prestige and power – the false gods Jesus rejected when tempted by them in the desert. We are fortunate that many of the saints taught and lived a preferential option for the poor. The motto of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, to which I belong, is *Evangelizare Pauperibus Misit Me* – “He sent me to evangelize the poor.” Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta taught this: “What we would like to do for Jesus whom we cannot see, we should do for the person next to us, whom we can see, and we will be doing it to Jesus.”

Frédéric Ozanam, in a letter to Louis Janmot, November 13, 1836, put it more bluntly: “Both men and the poor we see with the eyes of the flesh; they are there and we can put finger and hand in their wounds and the scars of the crown of thorns are visible on their foreheads; and at this point incredulity no longer has place and we should fall at their feet and say with the Apostle, ‘*Tu est Dominus et Deus meus.*’ You, the poor, are my Lord and my God! You are our masters, and we will be your servants. You are for us the sacred images of that God whom we do not see, and not knowing how to love Him otherwise, shall we not love Him in your persons?”

Someone who lived this Paschal spirituality was the late fellow Vincentian and deacon Hyland Fraser, who participated with me in a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Guadalupe shrine in Mexico City. On one excursion to a popular market, our group noticed a couple seated on the sidewalk, begging. He happened to pass by them again on his own as the group went about shopping.

This time, motivated by Pope Francis' call for us to show others the mercy of Jesus by reaching out and touching the poor, he knelt down on the street, looked them in the eye, gave them some money, and placing his hand on their heads while holding one of their hands, gave them a blessing. He then asked them to give him their blessing. They nodded, placed their hands on his head, and blessed him. He was profoundly moved by this encounter, and was teary-eyed as he humbly shared a homily with our group the next day. After seeing so many churches lined with gold plating, he had found Christ not so much there, but in this encounter with a poor couple.

Pope Francis, in a talk to a gathering of popular movements, said this: "Let us together say from the heart: no family without lodging; no rural worker without land; no laborer without rights; no people without sovereignty, no individual without dignity; no child without childhood; no young person without a future and no elderly person without a venerable old age. Keep up your struggle, and please, take care of Mother Earth."

All of this is an invitation to us, this Easter, to live out the Paschal Mystery and especially the appearances of Jesus, by doing our utmost to recognize him in the faces of the poor all around us.

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