



I AM THE *Resurrection* AND THE LIFE

John 11:25

Easter 2018

My Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Just after Christmas, I travelled to Ireland for what I thought would be a relaxing and joyful visit. I was looking forward to spending time with my mother and the rest of my family still in the area. Little did I know that I would end up spending most of the trip in the emergency room and later in Naas Hospital. In the early morning hours of January 2nd, my mother had a chronic stroke. As she lives alone, I was grateful that I was staying with her when this happened. After being taken away by ambulance to the ER, she received excellent care and because I was there I could be by her side as she recovered. The dedication, compassion and professionalism of the doctors, nurses and caregivers were impressive. In particular, I was delighted by the care my mother received from two people; one was a Muslim doctor from Egypt and the other a young male nurse from India who happened to be a Hindu. They were extremely kind, reassuring and respectful to my mother which brought my family great peace. Also, through my engagement with them they were pleased that I knew much about their beliefs and their culture.

As I reflected on what happened at this time in my mother's life and the profound impact it had on me, it would be a great shame if I solely treated this as a random act of kindness. Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, not only was his body totally transformed, but so were all life-giving experiences. These wonderful individuals become bodily manifestations of his presence in our lives.

It is interesting that the original sacrament of our faith is a person, Jesus Christ. In his humanity, he is the human face of God. In his words and actions, he is God's liberating and healing love made visible. So, in God's communication with humanity, what comes first is a person Jesus Christ.

As the risen glorified Lord, Jesus Christ continues to be the original sacrament of human encounter with God. Vatican II stresses that "Christ is always present to his disciples" so the question is how do we make contact with this risen, glorified Christ. Because his body has been transformed by the power of the resurrection, his bodily presence exists in a new way through the community of disciples. Jesus Christ has chosen to exist in the community of disciples, who gather in his name, who share his word and undertake acts of liberating and healing love. Those who respond to his call to discipleship become his bodily presence in the world today.

The same Spirit of God which animates and empowers the disciples of Jesus, the community of faith, hope and love, animated Jesus of whom the New Testament says ... "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power ... he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him." Acts 10:38

The following words, spoken by an elderly Catholic after attending a small community of faith for the first time, are symptomatic: "I always used to believe that Christ is risen because I believed the teaching of the Church. Today, at our Bible-sharing fellowship, I felt for the first time that Jesus is alive. It was the first time that I experienced his presence in this fellowship with people, who read the Word of God together and shared with one another what had touched them."

Today, as we celebrate Easter, we are not only celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; we are celebrating the truth that God continues to be with his people. The truth that in his resurrection, Jesus has chosen to remain with those who gather in his name.

Gathering in his name and responding to his call to "follow me" in acts of liberating and healing love is what we at St. Joseph's are doing to respond to Cardinal Cupich's initiative to Renew My Church.

We are establishing a new way of being church with our Communities for the Kingdom, small gatherings of people meeting in their homes. These groups strengthen our relationship with Christ and with each other, and build compassionate community to bring about the Kingdom of God in the world. They gather regularly to:

- read, listen, pray, reflect and share how God's word relates to our everyday lives,
- deepen and support a relationship with Jesus,
- satisfy the hunger for relationships that provide learning and unconditional acceptance,
- establish a greater sense of community and belonging, and
- provide a way for families to strengthen our faith together.

During the Easter season, I invite you to either join or form a Community for the Kingdom group. It would be a fitting way to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead as a truth that gives meaning to our lives and transforms all we say and do. This would take us from random acts of kindness to a true manifestation of his presence.

Happy Easter,

Fr. John Trout