

Today is the crucial day for our faith. The Christian faith stands or falls on the truth that Christ was raised from the dead. Because if Christ has not been raised from the dead, then Christianity is just a series of interesting ideas – more just a philosophy of life that we could just take or leave as we wish.

So it is the question of whether Jesus merely was or whether he also now is. Thanks be to God that we have eyewitness accounts that testify to the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus.

The Gospels faithfully record the event. Tonight, from the Gospel of Luke, we have the account of the witnesses of the women, including Saint Mary Magdalene, and also of Saint Peter. Tomorrow morning, we will hear the account from Saint John which gives us the witness of the same people – Saint Mary Magdalene, and Saint Peter, and also includes Saint John.

Now one might object, well these Gospel accounts of the Resurrection are not the same. The details are different. They're similar, yes, but not exactly the same. Well, if you were a police detective, and you were trying to solve a crime and two people gave you the exact same version of an event – every detail exactly the same – what would you think? If you were a good detective, you would be suspicious if every detail of their account was exactly the same. You would be suspicious that they had together preplanned what they were going to say. But if their accounts were very similar but not exactly the same, you would be more confident that they were telling you the truth as seen from their perspective.

So it is with the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection – very similar, but not exactly the same. This is a proof of their truthfulness. The Gospels faithfully record the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

But is the Resurrection of Jesus really so marvelous? I mean, Jesus had already raised a number of people from the dead during His ministry:

Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus

The little girl, the daughter of Jarius, was raised from the dead by Jesus

The widow's son was raised from the dead by Jesus

So how can it be said that Jesus' resurrection really is that big a deal or so crucial to our faith if this kind of thing had already happened several times over?

Here's the thing – Lazarus, the little girl, and the widow's son were raised from the dead, but they were raised back to this earthly life. At some point in their life, they died again.

Jesus rose from the dead, but He did not merely rise back to this earthly life. He rose to a new reality – a type of existence where death no longer had any power over Him. He would never die again. And this is the key thing about the Resurrection of Jesus – not just a raising back to this earthly life. A true conquering of death itself; a new existence, body and soul, beyond death. This is why we can say that Jesus is, He exists, He is alive.

Now for us, what does this mean? Imagine this: this new existence into which Jesus has gone, Jesus wants us to join Him. This is what Saint Paul is talking about in the second reading.

“If then we have died with Christ, we believe that we should also live with Him.”

“Dying with Christ” means first of all in baptism where Christ washes us clean by the power of His saving death on the cross, and then as we continue to die to sin in our lives, we prepare for external life. This is the great reason for our hope in this life. No matter how difficult this life gets for us, we never have reason to despair, because if we stay faithful to Christ, we shall join Him in His resurrection where there will be no more sorrow, struggle, or tears. Where Christ has gone, so we shall go – resurrected body and soul forever.

We as Catholics spend a lot of time contemplating the passion and death of our Savior on the Cross and rightly so for it is by the Cross of our Savior that salvation has come to us. But in the Resurrection of Jesus we see the full glory of what He has purchased for us: our hope and our glory, complete victory over sin and death.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on Easter, 2016.