

# RESURRECTION

Friar Bob Hutmacher, ofm

Once upon a time in 1975 I was in Clinical Pastoral Education at Mercy Hospital on Chicago's lakefront. This year of ministry training was required for ordination and for some reason I chose to learn what it takes to serve people in a hospital setting. One of the many requirements back then was to witness surgery so we knew what people went through. I chose open heart, an amputation and childbirth. They were all challenging to see but I learned a great deal about the mysteries within this body of ours. It was another avenue to God.

Then there was the saga of Muhammed Jazebi. A graduate student at Western in Macomb, Muhammed came here from Tehran, Iran. He was sent for cardiac surgery at Mercy for a heart valve replacement. He was also the first Muslim I'd ever had a chance to befriend, along with fellow students from Tehran who rallied around him. There was a long delay before surgery because in 1975 the valves used for replacement came from pigs, and that caused a religious dilemma. Would pork tissue in a Muslim make him forever unclean? There are precepts in the Quran that prohibit eating pork and so we had to wait weeks before word came to permit Muhammed to receive the pig valve. (Remember, this was before texting and email.) During those long, empty weeks we all became friends. I was introduced to the warmth of Islamic hospitality; we shared prayer in their apartment, in the hospital chapel and in Muhammed's room. I even learned to write my name in Farsi.

Once permission was received in writing from religious leaders in Tehran they proceeded with the valve replacement. Muhammed didn't wake up after surgery. For nearly three weeks he didn't wake up! Unbelievably, they pronounced him brain dead twice! Yet through those dark and frightening days his friends and I prayed often. His student sponsor came up from Macomb. Several Muslims, one Catholic and a Jew together in prayer presented quite a sound and vocabulary, one I certainly had never experienced. Somehow we came to know our shared God was with Muhammed and all of us

even when it looked like we'd never speak with him again. We offered lots of tears, a universal language that needs no translation.

At this time I lived in our friar community in Hyde Park at Catholic Theological Union so the trip to Bronzeville was time consuming. Our supervisor at Mercy, Sr. Cyrilla Zarek, OP, allowed me to get overly involved with Muhammed. That afforded me one of the best learning experiences of four years of graduate theology: how to intensely immerse oneself into a ministerial setting yet learn how to walk away from it to be attentive at another scene. Invaluable lesson Cyrilla gave me for the rest of my life!

God's grace moved me to visit him on a Saturday morning. Two Iranians and I stood in tears around Muhammed's bed because we were told this was his last day before they would withdraw life support. While ICU technicians checked monitors Muhammed opened his dark, Persian eyes and smiled. He lived! One nurse told us to simmer down because this was common in the death process. But he lived! He moved his eyes! Eventually it seemed the entire cardiac department was with us, astounded and completely baffled. He lived! They did, indeed, withdraw life support in just a few hours and not for the usual reason! Once his throat was moistened and given a chance to relax without the tube, he asked: "What happened?" Muhammed lived! I witnessed divine intervention because the doctors could not explain what happened. This was resurrection and we believed! And today, I believe!

I'm writing this article as we enter Holy Week and the Great Mystery of Pascha, the Lord's Passover to Eternal Glory. Our Church humbly kneels, sheds tears, listens to stories of our salvation in Christ and exults in light, glory and blazing new life. It is a spiritual, emotional and ecclesial



feast for the senses as we remember the great events of God's salvation in Christ. Holy Week is truly a reason to exhaust ourselves on every level in gratitude that our Crucified and Risen

Christ revealed God's love in its fullest and opened the Way to heaven for all.

I have come to understand that one basic aspect of the Paschal Mystery is that it is not just a story or theological exposition about Jesus. The reality is that Christ established for us **a way of life** ~ his death and resurrection allow us to take that sequence into the day-to-day of our very existence. The Mystery can help us make sense out of our daily lives. For example, briefly call to mind a period when you felt completely lost and alone. Who and what pulled you through that abyss into another phase of reality that was more uplifting and hopeful? What of an experience of losing someone you love through death? Or moving from your own home to nursing care? Changing jobs and towns and schools? A friend or even a spouse who drifts away? As adults, how do we cope with the suffering that life hands us? How do we make sense out of predicaments we find ourselves in or horrible circumstances we bring upon ourselves because of really bad moral choices? He lives!



*Resurrection, mosaic in Cathedral of St. Mark, Venice, 12<sup>th</sup> C*

If you love to read Scripture, take a look at all four Gospels and each evangelist's account of the Resurrection. You will immediately notice that not one records anyone seeing the moment of Resurrection. There are numerous appearance stories of the Risen Lord, yes, but not one person actually saw it happen. Art history would have us believe otherwise, e.g. with the Roman guards. However, read closely. Our faith system is founded on experiences of the Risen Lord, not eyewitness accounts of a resuscitation or a Hollywood moment of crashing lights. An angel

is seen in Mark but Mary Magdalene is the first to meet Jesus. All the appearance stories are rooted in experience, as is all theology. There are over 2.3 billion Christians worldwide and 1.2 billion Roman Catholics among them. Numbers like that astound me when I consider that our entire faith system is built on the experiences of just a tiny group of people. He lives!

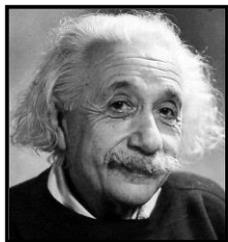
Death and Resurrection. It's a common literary thematic as far back as Greek theatre, probably beyond. Many of the world's fairy tales are written with the motif that the power of a child conquers evil, evidenced by *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Sleeping Beauty*. If you attend live theatre and experience the stories of human redemption through the dramas of Shakespeare, Arthur Miller or Adrienne Kennedy you know this theme.

Easter, however, is more powerful than a tale. There is an historical person named Jesus and the New Testament is exactly that: eye witness accounts of Jesus and a community's stories of how Jesus shaped their lives, drew them closer to God and changed human history. Moments of being raised up intertwine with the bad or evil we find in life (or that finds us) and draw us away from ourselves and into a "better place". This is redemption. In 1981 I was severely ill from peritonitis in, of all places, Mercy Hospital; I came very close to death but this faith of ours pulled me through, along with the prayers of family, friars and friends. I lived!

We also rise above many things that are not physical maladies. Look at our African-American history. I saw a clip of an African comedian and one of his observations about race relations in the U.S. was: "I know we've lots to do yet, but look – we have made progress. If we were together like this 200 years ago and I were standing here on stage before you, this would be an auction!" The plight of immigrants throughout the world is a story of loss and rebuilding lives, dying and rising. Millions of people must rise above the shame and pain of abuse in its many forms, the trauma of being bullied and the nightmare of gun violence. We can allow our attitudes to be changed by God and other people. We continuously learn how to die and rise with Christ because the pattern he established is not just a one-time thing. It occurs time and again throughout our lives! We live!

And Jesus is there in the middle of it all, if we only allow him in as guide and companion.

One of the great minds of 20<sup>th</sup> century science was Albert Einstein. Take in his words from 1940: *Being a lover of freedom, when the revolution came in Germany, I looked to the universities to defend it, knowing they had always boasted of their devotion to the cause of truth; but, no, the universities immediately were silenced. Then I looked to the great editors of the newspapers whose flaming editorials in days gone by had proclaimed their love of freedom; but they, too, were silenced in a few short weeks... Only the Catholic Church stood squarely across the path*



*of Hitler's campaign for suppressing truth. I never had any special interest in the Church before, but now I feel a great affection and admiration because the Church alone has had the courage and persistence to stand for intellectual truth and moral freedom. I am forced thus to confess that what I once despised I now praise unreservedly.* Albert Einstein [Dec. 23, 1940 issue of Time, p. 38.]

Einstein was purportedly a follower of Spinoza and thought science and religion have a necessary relationship but a personal God was not something he could advocate or believe in. However, his attitude about the Catholic Church changed as you see above in that Time article. We change and we live because Christ lives!

One of the constant themes I hear in prayer these days is for a restoration of common decency and legislators who work for the common good. Are these attainable through God's grace and our own inner goodness? We must believe they are! Remember the words of the Risen Jesus to Thomas in John 20:29? *Blessed are those who have not seen but believed.* We believe! It is on the foundation of our individual and shared experiences of the Risen Christ that we bring new life to our Church and our world. I've taken part in recent gatherings that express the need for gun control in the U.S. It's exciting to be surrounded by so many young people who cherish their lives, who want a future, who desire to dream of being at peace in a classroom. Hope lives in these very articulate people and I have often been taken back to my days in college when we dreamed and sang about an idyllic world of

peace, as in Lennon's *Imagine*. Did not the disciples of Jesus do the same? Did they not live through persecution and suffering because He continued to live in them? They remembered his death and resurrection and entered their own rhythm of dying and rising, thus giving Life to their world and Life that is still among us today. We believe! We live!

Thomas of Celano wrote the earliest biographies of St. Francis. In Book 1, chapter 15: "through the presence of Francis it seemed a new light had been sent from heaven to earth, driving away the darkness that had so nearly covered that whole region that hardly anyone knew where to turn. Deep forgetfulness of God and neglect of his commands overwhelmed almost everyone, so they could barely be roused from deep-seated evil. ***Francis gleamed like a shining star in the darkness of night and like the morning, spread over the darkness.***

We live in a present day darkness of lies, lust for power and misguided governance. There are days of struggles with diseases and broken relationships. The imbalance of our justice system is a source of embarrassment and suffering for some of us. Even the Church creates angst or pain for some among us who just want to live in her embrace. The great divide between values of Christ and our U.S. culture only widens and many are caught in the quagmire. These are the realities that life has brought us or that we've created ourselves.

Yet through our ministry here at St. Peter's we see evidence of the Paschal Mystery every day. God raises thousands to new life through the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, through counseling and spiritual direction and uplifting educational talks. We are extremely grateful for the many ways you support our work. We are grateful to God that we can share in the discipleship of Christ in the footsteps of Francis of Assisi to offer hope to countless people. May the Risen Christ fill you with joy and hope, peace and everything that is good this Easter and every day.

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