

Easter Sunday of the Resurrection – March 31, 2024 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.
Cathedral of Saint Paul, Birmingham, Alabama – 11:00am Mass – 775 words

On this Easter Sunday of 2024, I would like to consider a detail from the first reading, from the Acts of the Apostles.¹ It said that the Lord Jesus, after his resurrection, was “visible, not to all the people, but to ... the witnesses chosen by God in advance”. He only appeared to a select, relative few. But why? Why did he not instead appear to large crowds, or even to those who had crucified him? After all, after such a victory, would not it seem more fitting for him to wow as many as possible with his triumph?

But our starting point in answering such a question is not with what we might think would have been more fitting, but with the fact of what the Lord actually did. He has done all things well;² he always does what is best. Moreover, his kingdom is not of this world.³ We recall how, throughout the gospels, so many wanted to crown and enthrone him as king,⁴ fancying that he would overturn the Roman rulers and restore the kingdom to Israel. To appear to large crowds might only have reinforced such erroneous ideas.

A consideration of scriptural history will also shed more light on the question. God did, in fact, show himself in spectacular ways on many occasions in the past. Think of the plagues he visited upon Egypt, in fulfillment of the prophecy he had spoken through Moses;⁵ but then, as the people, freed from Pharaoh, marched through the desert on their way to the promised land, they continually griped and grumbled. But God wowed them again with the crossing of the Red Sea.⁶ Yet again, however, they were unfaithful afterwards.

Even later, if we fast-forward a few thousand years, we see where God gave incredible signs concerning the birth of Jesus Christ. Magi came from the east; people spoke about it throughout the surrounding land. But just thirty or so years later, when Christ worked a public miracle, they could not understand who he was. “Is this not the carpenter’s son?”, they asked.⁷ Throughout scripture, we see over and over again how God worked marvelous signs before large numbers, and they still forgot him; they still strayed.

There is a time when all will behold God and perceive most clearly his victory – and that time is at the end of history. Then every secret will be revealed, as individuals, entire nations, and the whole world are judged. Beyond that point, it will not be possible to appeal the Lord’s judgment or ever to stray from it again. Until then, however, he has determined not to wow over big crowds, but to reveal himself to a select few. And that select few he has commissioned: “Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing... and teaching them...”.⁸

He is always able to do a lot with a little. And we make up part of that “little” as well. Even though he has not revealed his resurrection to us like he did to his chosen witnesses, yet he has revealed himself to us spiritually and called us. We have heard his call and that is why we are here. Moreover, we know him in the “breaking of the bread” – we know, by the divine faith he has given us, that he is truly present in the Holy Eucharist, and with him there, we have communion; from that intimate encounter, he further directs our hearts.

¹ Inspiration for this homily came from Cardinal Newman’s sermon, “Witnesses of the Resurrection”: John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 22 (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1997), pp. 181-188.

² See Mark 7:37.

³ See John 18:36.

⁴ See, for example, John 6:15.

⁵ See Exodus chapters 7-11.

⁶ See Exodus 14:10-22.

⁷ See Matthew 13:55.

⁸ See Matthew 28:19-20.

It is easy to become discouraged when we see what is happening in our world today and where it seems to be heading. Indeed, we might be tempted at times to think that God has abandoned the helm. But do not be fooled. He has long operated this way, working through a relative few, through those chosen by him – including you and me. He did not come to establish a political movement and his kingdom is not here. Our task is not to curse the darkness but to focus on the light, and that light is first of all in our hearts.

“Yes, Christ my hope is arisen; to Galilee he goes before you”, we sang in the Sequence. Jesus goes before us always. We find him in many ways: above all, in the Holy Eucharist, where he also precedes us, coming out to meet us. He can always do a lot with a little. As his little followers, a relative few compared to the overall whole, may we go forth from here this Easter with renewed conviction not to be distracted by the gloomy darkness, but to follow Christ’s light always with humble trust and strive to do the work of his kingdom.