

Christ is Risen! (*He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!*)

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit

What do you think it would've been like to find the tomb empty?
What if you were weeping with Mary outside the tomb?
Would your faith be stronger?
Would you be more fervent in your prayers?
Or fight harder against your sinful flesh?

If you were with Mary,
and saw the angels dressed in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain,
would you love the poor and listen to your wife and pay attention to your kids?

Would you be a better Christian?
Would you be a better person?

We often think this way.
Especially during Holy Week, with all the readings and meditations—
almost a reenactment of those last days of Christ's life—
we have that desire that says:
“I wonder what'd be like to be there...”

We wonder whether we would've denied Jesus like Peter.
We wonder if we'd be as faithful as the centurion or the thief on the cross.
We wonder if we'd carry the cross like Simon or spit on Him like the guards.
Would we go with our gut (or even our wife's gut), or cave in to the pressure of the crowds?

And all of these thoughts and imaginations flow from the idea that *they* really had a better view.
We think their faith was stronger because they felt the veins in his arms
and heard the tremble of his voice
and saw the stone rolled away.

And in these desires or imaginations, we find that we're no better than Thomas:
“*Unless I see in His hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the
nails, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe.*” (Jn 20:25)

That is pure unbelief.
And no matter how holy it sounds to say: “Oh, I wish I could've been there”—
its equally unfaithful and even demonic.

I'll let you know this much:
it doesn't help to see the empty tomb.

They saw it, and they still didn't get it.

Look at how the various Scripture accounts give it:

In John's Gospel, as Mary sees the angels where Jesus' body was, the angels say:

“ ‘Woman, why are you weeping?’

She said to them, ‘They have taken away my Lord,

and I do not know where they have laid Him.’ ”

Then she sees Jesus, but thinks He's the gardener and accuses Him of moving the body.

It's not 'til Jesus says, “*Mary*” that she clings to Him with joy.

In Luke's Gospel we hear:

“But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.”

And Luke tells us they *“were perplexed about this.”*

Again, it's not until the angels say,

“Remember how He told you, while He was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise.” (Lk 24:1-7)

It's even worse in Mark's Gospel!

“And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. And he said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples and Peter that He is going before you to Galilee. There you will see Him, just as He told you.’ And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.” (Mk 16:4-8)

No one believed by seeing the empty tomb.

No Christians were made by seeing the stone, or investigating the grave cloths,
or interviewing the angel or the guards.

No one thought resurrection—

it was fear, confusion, even despair.

You weren't there for the cross or the empty tomb.

And it's a good thing.

For *“blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”* (Jn 20:29)

Belief can't be coerced.

You can't force someone into the faith.

You can't convince them or prove it to them or win them over by persuasion.

There's no formula—not even a blood cross and an empty tomb.

The very best that our reason and arguments can do is to show historically *that* it happened.

But that sort of faith even the demons have—and *shudder!* (James 2:19)

No the faith that Christ delivers to Thomas and to the Apostles comes not from the empty tomb,
but from His mouth, from the word of *peace*.

“Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Rom 10:17)

But none can hear without a voice and a voice can’t speak unless it’s sent with a word.
And *that’s* what goes on behind closed doors that 8th day of Easter long ago.

Christ speaks His word of peace to the apostles,
and He then charges them to be speakers of this peace to the world.
“As the Father has sent Me, even so I am sending you.” (Jn 20:21)

Then He breathes on them.
That breathing is the giving of the Holy Spirit.
It’s the institution of the office of the Holy Ministry.
It’s the establishing of preachers, voices sent with the Word of Christ.

This is what creates faith: the preaching of Christ crucified for the forgiveness of your sin.

And for this you’re here.
You’re here to receive from Christ this forgiveness.
You’re here so that the peace of Christ would dwell in you,
so that your fears would be cast aside,
so that your doubts would be put away,
so that your anger and hatred, jealousy and confusion, would all give way to Christ
and Christ alone.

You’re here because this is where Jesus is.
He’s not on the cross and He’s not hanging around some empty tomb.
He’s not in Bethlehem or Galilee or at the Temple.
Jesus is here, in His Word and in His holy Sacrament.

To wish you were there—either at the cross or the grave—
is to wish you were somewhere apart from Christ,
or to have Him in a way He hasn’t given Himself to you.

So don’t try running back in time—
instead, like the young ones with us today, run to the altar.

Cling to His promise: *this is My body, this is My blood given for you*.
And here at the altar confess with St. Thomas: *“My Lord and my God!”* (Jn 20:28)

For here is your strength and faith and hope and love.

Christ is risen! (*He’s risen indeed, alleluia!*)

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