

EASTER DAY – 2021
Acts 10:34;37-43
Col 3:1-4
Jn 20:1-9

We often hear the phrase, “Seeing is believing” but it is possible to see and not believe. To some degree, St John’s gospel focusses on the relationship between seeing and believing. In the early chapters of the gospel, Nathaniel and the villagers in the place where the woman from Samaria lived, were invited to come and see Jesus for themselves so that they might come to believe that he is the Messiah. Many people saw Jesus. They saw his face, hands and body. They saw what he did and heard what he said, yet only a few saw something in him to worship.

John’s gospel says that those who both see and believe have been drawn by the Father (Jn 6:44), so to know Jesus is to know the Father in Jesus. This issue of seeing and believing was not resolved when Jesus was laid in the tomb and it was still an issue for those who claimed to ‘see’ him after his resurrection.

Mary Magdalen went to the tomb early on Easter morning and found the stone rolled away. Grave robbery was a serious problem at that time, so she probably assumed that that is what had happened. She runs to tell Peter and John who run to the tomb and find the body gone but the grave cloths still there. Grave robbers would have taken everything. The disciples didn’t know what had happened, but John’s gospel tells us that Peter saw this and believed (Jn 20:8).

Jesus’ enemies believed that if they removed him from being a visible person, his followers would stop believing in him. But after his resurrection he appeared to some of his followers so they could be assured that although he was not visible to them in the way that he had been, he was still present with them. It was the moment of recognition of the risen Christ’s presence that turned their seeing into believing. Mary Magdalene in the Garden, the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus and other disciples in the Upper Room and by Lake Tiberias, and St Luke tells us (Acts 1:3-4) that Jesus made his presence known for forty days. The disciples experienced Jesus’ presence in a different way. These were real experiences that they could pass on to other people and so grow the Church which is that community of fellowship between heaven and earth.

The life of the Church is a communion with the Father through the Son who was once a living historical person who was born, lived, died and became triumphant over death. He is still the one in whom and through whom, we can see God and so believe in him.

It is C S Lewis who said, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen : not only because I can see it, but because by it I see everything else” (“Is theology poetry?” A paper presented to the Oxford Socratic Club).

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