

“Stay with us...”

Encounters with the Risen Lord

Fr. Thomas Rosica, CSB

Foreword by **His Beatitude Michel Sabbah**
Latin Patriarch-emeritus of Jerusalem



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Foreword

Fr. Thomas Rosica, a member of the Congregation of Priests of St. Basil (Basilian Fathers), is a Scripture scholar and the founding chief executive officer of the Salt and Light Catholic Media Foundation and Television Network. Though he has many other titles and responsibilities in the Canadian Church and in society, I believe that the best title for him is “lover of Jerusalem.” I first met him in 1990, during his graduate studies at the École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem, where I asked him to assist me in a special ministry with seminarians and parish priests, who always admired his teaching ability. But Fr. Rosica’s main activity was his zeal to discover Jesus in his land. He discovered the Lord in the Holy Places which continue to preserve the memory of the mystery of God in the midst of men and women of all times.

This little book, entitled “*Stay with Us...*,” is a collection of reflections on the Gospels and is the result of Fr. Rosica’s years of prayer and studies in Jerusalem and in the Holy

Land – the land of the Gospel. The author lived here for some time to get to know Jesus Christ and his Gospel better. The biblical reflections in this book are the result of his prayer and his studies in the Land of Jesus. As he himself says in his introduction, “Many of those reflections matured while I lived and studied in Jerusalem.” Throughout these reflections, the reader feels that Fr. Rosica has a certain nostalgia for the land and for his Lord, who made this land holy – the land of humanity’s redemption.

He presents Jesus Christ, man and God, the eternal Word of God, to our modern world through the mystery of the cross. He says with St. Paul: “We preach Jesus Christ,” the scandal and folly of the cross, in order to become mature men and women who can transcend the borders of humanity, and know, as the author says, that death or evil do not have the last word. The tragic, violent events of Good Friday are not the end of the story. Death is not the final answer. And God knows how many acts of violence and tragedies are woven into our daily lives even to this day. In the face of the mystery of evil, how many people simply lower their arms in despair and sentence themselves to not believing or seeing the mystery of God among us and within us!

Fr. Rosica has focused his reflections on the Lord who sanctified the land and has kept in the secret of his prayer the men and women who continue to suffer in that land, awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem and all its inhabitants who are still at war. Today it is still called the

Holy Land, even though it continues to be torn apart by a never-ending war among its two peoples. Someone who believes in the mystery of this land may sense a deadly connection between the holiness of the land and the evil of war that has continued through the centuries and is still lived here today by its inhabitants. Though it is the city of the redemption of the world, Jerusalem itself has not yet welcomed its redemption.

The author tells us that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the answer. The Lord has overcome death and evil. This is true. But what many men and women of our time are seeking is the resurrection in themselves, in their own lives, and in the history of so many countries at war, beginning with the Holy Land. A question and a drama which the author invites us to accept is the folly of the cross, so that we can conquer evil in and around us. Through their contribution, believers in our time bring a little more light and a little more love into the world.

Fr. Rosica proposes another reflection which can guide a human life. Every human being and every believer is sent by God into the world: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John 20:21). Addressing the Father, Jesus says: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (John 17:18). Every man and woman is sent to proclaim the Resurrection in our time. In the author's words, "To speak about the resurrection is never an event only in the remote past or in distant future reality. It is best understood in the living community we call Church."

We live in the hope of seeing a “new heaven and a new earth” (Revelation 21:1), not in eternity, but already here on earth where we are faced with the same mystery of evil. And we repeat the sentence of Martha to Jesus: “Lord, if you had been here” (John 11:21), there would not have been all this evil, all these wars, all these merchants of death. But the Lord *is* here; we must return to the Jerusalem of the heart to find him and to believe that evil, despite all the reality to the contrary, does not have the last word. “Those who believe in me ... will live” (John 11:25), says Jesus, and that person will triumph over evil.

We may consider one of the author’s sentences to be the beginning of a response to the mystery of evil in the world: “The future has already begun.” The future, which is the eternity of God – his light, triumph and the end of the present, which is an ongoing struggle. We are grateful to Fr. Rosica for his willingness to share his reflections that matured in the Holy Land and are now offered to all those who seek life in our time.

His Beatitude Michel Sabbah
Latin Patriarch-emeritus of Jerusalem

Jerusalem, September 14, 2017
Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross

Preface

[The Resurrection] is part of the mystery of God that he acts so gently, that he only gradually builds up his history within the great history of mankind; that he becomes man and so can be overlooked by his contemporaries and by the decisive forces within history; that he suffers and dies and that, having risen again, he chooses to come to mankind only through the faith of the disciples to whom he reveals himself; that he continues to knock gently at the doors of our hearts and slowly opens our eyes if we open our doors to him. And yet – is not this the truly divine way? Not to overwhelm with external power, but to give freedom, to offer and elicit love. And if we really think about it, is it not what seems so small that is truly great?

Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI

Jesus of Nazareth – Holy Week:

From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection, p. 276

This little book came about in response to the very positive reception of my reflections on *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, published in 2017. Words or expressions uttered by Jesus on the cross lead us into a deeper relationship with the Lord who gave his life for us. With eyes of faith, we see beyond the humiliating death of Jesus of Nazareth and glimpse our God of mercy, redemption and enduring, endless love. But the tragic, violent events of Good Friday are not the end of the story. Death is not the final answer. This is the stunning proclamation or *kerygma* common to each evangelist: that God raised Jesus from the dead. He is the Lord of life! We have been saved by Jesus Christ! *Kerygma* (from the Greek *keryssein*, to proclaim, and *keryx*, herald) refers to the initial and essential proclamation of the Gospel message. The word appears nine times in the New Testament: once in Matthew (12:41), once in Mark (16:20), once in Luke (11:32), and six times in the letters of St. Paul (Romans 16:25; 1 Corinthians 1:21, 2:4, 15:14; 2 Timothy 4:17; and Titus 1:3). The *kerygma* is the very heart of the Gospel, the core message of the Christian faith that all believers are invited to proclaim. It is the duty of the Church to proclaim always and everywhere the Gospel of Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. To proclaim Jesus Christ, therefore, is the Church's mission. In his 1990 masterful encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio, On the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate*, St. John Paul II emphasized how essential *kerygma* is in the life and mission of the Church:

Proclamation is the permanent priority of mission. The Church cannot elude Christ's explicit mandate, nor deprive men and women of the "Good News" about their being loved and saved by God. "Evangelization will always contain – as the foundation, center, and at the same time the summit of its dynamism – a clear proclamation that, in Jesus Christ ... salvation is offered to all people, as a gift of God's grace and mercy." All forms of missionary activity are directed to this proclamation, which reveals and gives access to the mystery hidden for ages and made known in Christ (cf. Eph 3:3-9; Col 1:25-29), the mystery which lies at the heart of the Church's mission and life, as the hinge on which all evangelization turns.

... The subject of proclamation is Christ who was crucified, died, and is risen: through him is accomplished our full and authentic liberation from evil, sin and death; through him God bestows "new life" that is divine and eternal. This is the "Good News" which changes man and his history, and which all peoples have a right to hear (RM 44).

In another important section of St. John Paul II's encyclical letter, we read of the different emphases found in each evangelist's story of Jesus:

As for the different emphases found in each version, Mark presents mission as proclamation or

facing. This is the very reason why there are differences in the Gospel accounts of the Resurrection. We cannot preach the Good News of the Resurrection without taking into account the historical and theological situations of the evangelists and their communities.

Let us be very honest and admit that today, just as in the time of Luke writing in the Acts of the Apostles about the men and women of Athens, “[they] spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21). Is it not true that many who hear about the Resurrection today respond to it as the people of Athens did back then? “When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, ‘We will hear you again about this’” (Acts 17:32). What appeared to be a second chance offered to Paul of Tarsus to clarify matters was in reality a royal brushoff! In today’s language, it could be something like “Yeah, right, heard that and done that!”

In our day, as in Paul’s time, the Christian proclamation of Resurrection faith remains a stumbling block. Many who believe in the Resurrection of Jesus have often confused his Resurrection with the resuscitation of a dead body. They do not see the difference between God’s raising his only son from the dead and Jesus’ restoring Lazarus to ordinary life. The difference is clear: Lazarus had to die again. Jesus’ life was not the same before and after his death. Jesus’ life was totally transformed into a glorious existence that is now free from the limitations of space and time and is no longer subject to death. It is a reality difficult to fathom!

Introduction

Judaism has never been a monolithic religion. The Sadducees in the New Testament were of the priestly class – many of them were aristocratic, wealthy and theologically conservative. Scripture for them consisted only of the five books of Moses. No teaching was authoritative if it was not found in those books, called the Pentateuch, and they found no doctrine of the resurrection there. They baited Jesus with one of their classic “what if” questions, a question on which their minds had been settled long ago: there is no resurrection of the dead. They ridiculed the idea of the resurrection. Jesus rejects their naïve understanding of the resurrection (Luke 20:35-36) and then argues on behalf of the resurrection of the dead on the basis of the written law (20:37-38) that the Sadducees accept. There was no spirit of inquiry or desire to learn among them.

The Pharisees and many of the Lord’s contemporaries hoped for the resurrection. They not only included the prophets and the writings in their Scripture, but also believed in the authority of the oral tradition from Moses.

The basis for belief in the resurrection was found in the oral tradition. The subject was heatedly debated between the Pharisees and Sadducees, a fact that Paul used to draw attention away from himself during his trial before the Jewish Council (Acts 23:6-10).

From the very beginning Christian faith in the resurrection has met with incomprehension and opposition. On no point does our faith encounter more opposition than on the resurrection of the body. St. Paul forcefully addressed the problem among the Corinthians: their denial of the resurrection of the dead (1 Corinthians 15:12) and their inability to imagine how any kind of bodily existence could be possible after death (15:35). Paul affirmed both the essential corporeity of the resurrection and its future orientation. His response moves through three steps: a recall of the basic *kerygma* about Jesus' Resurrection (15:1-11), an assertion of the logical inconsistencies involved in denying the resurrection of the dead (15:12-34), and an attempt to perceive theologically what the properties of the resurrected body must be (15:35-58).

Any denial of resurrection (15:12) involves logical inconsistencies. The basic one, stated twice (15:13, 16), is that if there is no such thing as (bodily) resurrection, then it has not taken place even in Christ's case. The consequences for the Corinthians were grave: both forgiveness of sins and salvation become an illusion, despite their strong convictions about both. Unless Christ is risen, their faith does not save. The question of the resurrection is vital and central not only to the Christian faith, but to all people who reflect on life and death.

Mark's Resurrection Account: A Call to Discipleship

Christians need to go out where Jesus is not known, or where Jesus is persecuted, or where Jesus is disfigured, to proclaim the true Gospel... To go out in order to proclaim. And, also, in this going out there is life, the life of the preacher is played out. He is not safe; there are no life insurance policies for preachers. And if a preacher seeks a life insurance policy, he is not a true preacher of the Gospel: He doesn't go out, he stays in place, safe. So, first of all: Go, go out. The Gospel, the proclamation of Jesus Christ, goes forth, always; on a journey, always. On a physical journey, on a spiritual journey, on a journey of suffering: we think of the proclamation of the Gospel that leads to so many wounded people – so many wounded people! – who offer their sufferings for the Church, for the Christians. But they always go out of themselves.

*Excerpt of the Daily Homily of Pope Francis
Domus Sanctae Marthae, Vatican City
April 25, 2017*

As St. John Paul II pointed out in his encyclical letter *Redemptoris Missio*, the evangelist Mark presents mission as proclamation or *kerygma*: “Preach the Gospel” (Mark 16:15). His aim is to lead his readers to repeat Peter’s profession of faith: “You are the Christ” (Mark 8:29), and to say with the Roman centurion who stood before the body of Jesus on the cross: “Truly this man was the Son of God!” (Mark 15:39) (RM 23).

Biblical scholars are almost universally agreed that Mark is the earliest Gospel, a fact that has serious implications for our understanding of the story of Jesus and how it was passed down to us from the beginning. The main problem with the Gospel of Mark for the final editors of the New Testament was that it appeared to be terribly deficient! In the first place, it is significantly shorter than the other Gospels – with only 16 chapters, compared to Matthew’s 28, Luke’s 24 and John’s 20 and 21. We know nothing of Jesus’ origins, according to Mark. There is a disproportionate emphasis on the Passion, suffering and death of Jesus. Even more significant is how Mark concludes it. The ending of this Gospel is strange! The Shorter Ending is found in 16:1-8. Mark 16:9-20, called the Longer Ending, has traditionally been accepted as a canonical part of the Gospel and was defined as such by the Council of Trent. Early citations of it by the Council Fathers indicate that it was composed by the second century, although vocabulary and style suggest that it was written by someone other than Mark. This ending is a general summary of the material

concerning the appearances of the risen Jesus, reflecting, in particular, traditions found in Luke chapter 24 and John chapters 20 and 21.

A startling ending

In the earliest Gospel account of the Resurrection, found in Mark 16:1-8, the final scene is a startling one. The three women whom Mark named as having watched the crucifixion – two of whom also saw where the tomb was – buy spices as soon as the Sabbath is over, on Saturday evening after sunset. They go to the tomb at dawn the following morning, the first day of the workweek, expecting to have difficulty with the massive stone, and earnestly wishing that someone stronger will be around to help. It is an awesome, eerie, shocking scene. The women were not going to the tomb to witness Jesus' Resurrection! Such a thing was unthinkable. They were going to complete the Jewish burial ritual, a sad but necessary task both for respecting the body of the deceased and for covering over the smell of bodily decomposition. Other bodies would in due course be buried in the same tomb, prior to Jesus' bones being collected and put into an ossuary for the secondary entombment. Upon arriving at the garden tomb, the women got the shock of their lives. The stone was already rolled away! They found a young man, not an angel, who calmly explained to them that Jesus had been raised from the dead and would see them again in Galilee. The man told them:

“Do not be alarmed: you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you.” So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid. (Mark 16:6-8)

The specific mention of Peter is not necessarily to give him a place of primacy among the apostles, but rather to stress that after his pitiful denials of his master and friend, Peter was not to be considered as one beyond redemption. The women were scared out of their wits and rushed home. They most likely passed several people on the way, but they didn't say a word. They were in shock!

This original ending of Mark's Gospel was viewed by later Christians as so deficient that not only was Mark placed second in the New Testament, but various endings were added by editors and copyists in some manuscripts that tried to soften this brutal, shocking ending and correct the story. The longest, most elaborate ending, which became Mark 16:9-19, was accepted by many Protestants and was included in the King James Version of the Bible, as well as in translations of the Latin Vulgate, used by Catholics. For countless millions of Christians over the centuries, the second ending became Sacred Scripture! Its

authenticity is questionable, because it is not found in our earliest and most reliable Greek copies of Mark's Gospel. The language and style of the Greek is clearly not Markan, and the scribes and final editors most likely incorporated sections of the endings of Matthew, Luke and John to create a "proper" ending for Mark.

But the most striking aspect of Mark's ending is that we never encounter the Risen Lord! Is it possible that Mark's Gospel can really end with 16:8? What can we say about a resurrection story in which the risen Jesus himself never appears? How could Mark differ so much from Matthew's elaborate chapter 28 and Luke's masterful chapter 24; or John's highly developed portraits of the first witnesses of the Risen Lord in chapters 20 and 21?

The message of Mark's Gospel

Rather than dismiss the strangeness of Mark's ending, let us take stock of what Mark's Gospel offers us. Since Mark is our earliest account of Jesus' life, written (according to most scholars) around the time of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, or shortly before that defining event, we have strong textual evidence that the first generation of Jesus' followers had no problem with a Gospel account that recounted no appearances of the Risen Jesus. We have to assume that the author of Mark's Gospel did not consider his account deficient in his transmission of the Jesus story and what he considered to be the authentic Good News about Jesus of Nazareth.

Is it not true that most preachers, pastoral ministers, catechists and Christians ignore Mark’s account of the Resurrection? Since there is no mention of anyone encountering the Risen Lord, we don’t allow Mark to have a voice in anything to do with the Resurrection of Jesus! On the other hand, if we allow Mark to speak to us as the first Gospel witness, we will learn something utterly amazing.

On the last night of Jesus’ life in Mark’s Gospel, he told his close friends, following their meal, “But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee” (Mark 14:28). Mark believes that Jesus has been “lifted up” or “raised up” to the right hand of God, and the disciples would “see” him in Galilee. Mark believes that the disciples experienced appearances of and encounters with the Risen Jesus once they returned to Galilee after the eight-day Passover festival – and returned to their old fishing jobs in despair. This is what is related in the Gospel of Peter, one of the non-canonical gospels rejected as apocryphal by the Church Fathers and the Catholic Church’s synods of Carthage and Rome, which formally established the New Testament canon. This Gospel of Peter, which had been carefully preserved in Egypt, was the first of the non-canonical gospels to be rediscovered. In that apocryphal text, Peter says:

Now it was the final day of the Unleavened Bread; and many went out returning to their home since the feast was over. But we twelve disciples of the Lord were weeping and sorrowful; and each one,

sorrowful because of what had come to pass, departed to his home. But I, Simon Peter, and my brother Andrew, having taken our nets, went off to the sea. And there was with us Levi of Alphaeus whom the Lord

This same tradition shows up in an appended ending to the Gospel of John – chapter 21, where a group of disciples are portrayed back at their old fishing jobs on the Sea of Galilee. Also, Matthew knows the tradition of a strange encounter on a specific mountain in Galilee, where some of the eleven apostles doubt what they are actually seeing (Matthew 28:16-17)!

The Easter faith that Mark reflects, namely that Jesus has been “raised up” or lifted up to heaven, is similar to that mentioned by St. Paul, who is the earliest witness to Jesus’ Resurrection in the 50s AD. Since Matthew, Luke and John come much later and clearly reflect the period after 70 AD when all of the first witnesses were dead – including Peter, Paul and James the brother of Jesus – they are clearly second-generation traditions.

Mark’s is a very mysterious Gospel. Throughout his account, people are forever being told to remain silent; at the end of the story, the women do just that. Mark’s Resurrection story contains an initial declaration and summary statement of all of Jesus’ teaching in the Gospel: “Do not be alarmed” (16:6). The reader is told to abandon every fear. Second, the reader is told: “you are looking for