

## Raised From The Dead



Acts 3:12 "Peter addressed the people, 'You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, **whom God raised from the dead.** To this we are witnesses.'"

So here is the story that preceded today's first Reading. "One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for

alms. Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. Peter said, 'I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with wonder and astonishment at what had happened to him. While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished." And so, Peter rehearses the recent events of Jesus arrest, death, and resurrection.

And there is an important clue to the nature of the Resurrection in Peter's speech. In all the early sermons as recorded in Acts, as well as in all the letters of Paul, and of Peter, and the one to the Hebrews (cf. Acts 2.23, 2.32, 3.15, 4.10, 5.30 etc.; Rom. 4.24-5, 6.4, 8.11; 1 Cor. 15.4; 2 cor. 4.14; Gal. 1.1; Eph. 1.20; Heb. 13.20, etc.; 1 Pet. 1.21), thus in all of the earliest reports of the Resurrection, it is repeatedly and clearly stated that 'God raised Jesus from the

dead.' The verb in each of these cases is transitive; the subject acting upon the direct object. God raised Jesus. Jesus is simply the recipient of God's activity. Jesus has been raised from the dead by God. It is an action, not of Jesus, but of God. God is the initiator; God is the one who does the thing that is done. It is God's hand that saves.

But by the time the Evangelists have written their Gospels, there has been a subtle, but I think very crucial change in emphasis. For in other places in the four Gospels and in numerous even later accounts, it is stated again and again instead that 'Jesus rose from the grave.' The verb construction is changed and becomes intransitive. It appears then to be more Jesus' action, not God's. Jesus rose from the tomb, we now say. "Alleluia Christ is risen" we repeatedly proclaim, "The Lord is risen indeed." He is the active one now, and the power seems to belong to him. Though we may say it in a variety of ways, we have altered, I think, the authentic Easter message. And in doing so we make the Resurrection something that Jesus did rather than something which God the Father did. And interestingly, all three of the predictions of the Passion by Jesus in the Gospels are in the intransitive form, the later formula, not the earlier one, suggesting again that the Passion predictions are not authentic, but were added to the story later

by the Gospel writers so as to suggest that Jesus wasn't caught unaware of what would happen.

Thus, I do not believe that Jesus knew what would happen to him there at the end. He did not know that he would be resurrected. He died like all of us mortals, with uncertainty of what lay beyond the grave. As we saw during Holy Week, Jesus became passive during his arrest and crucifixion, he allowed himself to be handed over, and he becomes the one acted upon by others. He was arrested. He was bound and dragged from place to place. He was beaten. He was spit upon. He was crucified. He was like a lamb before the slaughter. His own words and his own actions have become ineffectual.

But Jesus trusted in God despite the actions of those around him. He gave no thought of himself at the end, or what would happen to him. It was God's will that must be done, he prayed at Gethsemane. It was into his Father's hands that he commended his spirit on the cross. Jesus simply let go, and let God. It was an act of great and abiding trust. It was a redemptive act of faith. And God did not abandon Jesus but came to his help and rescued him.

And after all the others had done to Jesus as they wished, God is the one who does the thing that is finally done. And it is in the last analysis God's action that matters most, not the others', not Jesus', and not our own. Thus, what happened that

first Easter morning so long ago was totally unexpected. It was an unforeseen epiphany of the power of God. It was a great bewildering mystery, and the disciples' confusing retelling of that great mystery is itself evidence of its unexpectedness. For the various Gospel accounts do indeed conflict with one another in announcing the Resurrection time after time. For instance, in the Fourth Gospel, only Mary Magdalene is reported as going to the tomb that Easter morning (Jn. 20.1). In Matthew's account, it is Mary Magdalene and the other Mary who go. Mark also includes Salome. And Luke suggests that they were even other women present. In Mark's account, the women discover a young man, robed in white, who announces the resurrection. In Matthew's account, he is identified as an angel. In Luke's version, there are two angels. In the Fourth Gospel, it is Jesus himself who appears. In Mark's Gospel, the message of the angels is that the disciples will see the Resurrected Jesus in Galilee, but in Luke's version, they see him in Jerusalem.

There is also total confusion in the telling of this tale, except for one fact, namely, that God did something powerful and unexpected that day, that God raised Jesus from the tomb in some fashion or another, and that that fact changes everything else. Those early Christians, just like Christians today, may disagree about the exact details and what it all means. But we all remain united on this day in asserting God's mysterious power and the

fact that Jesus was alive again. Thus, we celebrate and proclaim, not that Jesus rose from the tomb, but that God raised him. How God did it, I do not know. But I am ready to boldly confess my faith in God. For in God and in his activity lies our ultimate hope of eternal life, of our sharing with Jesus in the resurrection of the dead. For God can and still works wonders in our lives, if we but let him, if we but trust in the Father as Jesus did. For God, and God alone, can make new that which is old in our lives, can raise up that which has been put down, can recover that which was lost, and can bring to life that which was dead. Amen.