

ZE07040721 - 2007-04-07

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-19355?l=english>

## Father Cantalamessa on Easter Faith

### "The Lord Is Risen and Was Seen Alive"

ROME, APRIL 7, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by the Pontifical Household preacher, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, on the readings for Easter Sunday's liturgy.

\* \* \*

He is Risen!

Easter Sunday

Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Colossians 3:1-4; John 20:1-9

There are men -- we see this in the phenomenon of suicide bombers -- who die for a misguided or even evil cause, mistakenly retaining, but in good faith, that the cause is a worthy one.

Even Christ's death does not testify to the truth of his cause, but only the fact that he believed in its truth. Christ's death is the supreme witness of his charity, but not of his truth. This truth is adequately testified to only by the Resurrection. "The faith of Christians," says St. Augustine, "is the resurrection of Christ. It is no great thing to believe that Jesus died; even the pagans believe this, everyone believes it. The truly great thing is to believe that he is risen."

Keeping to the purpose that has guided us up to this point, we must leave faith aside for the moment and attend to history. We would like to try to respond to the following question: Can Christ's resurrection be defined as a historical event, in the common sense of the term, that is, did it "really happen"?

There are two facts that offer themselves for the historian's consideration and permit him to speak of the Resurrection: First, the sudden and inexplicable faith of the disciples, a faith so tenacious as to withstand even the trial of martyrdom; second, the explanation of this faith that has been left by those who had it, that is, the disciples. In the decisive moment, when Jesus was captured and executed, the disciples did not entertain any thoughts about the resurrection. They fled and took Jesus' case to be closed.

In the meantime something had to intervene that in a short time not only provoked a radical change of their state of soul, but that led them to an entirely different activity and to the founding of the Church. This "something" is the historical nucleus of Easter faith.

The oldest testimony to the Resurrection is Paul's: "For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: That Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he rose again according to the Scriptures; and that he was seen by Cephas, and after that by the eleven.

"Then he was seen by more than 500 brethren at once, of whom many are still with us and some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen by James, then by all the apostles. And last of all, he was seen also by me, as by one born out of due time" (1 Corinthians 15:3-8).

## ZENIT

These words were written around A.D. 56 or 57. But the core of the text is constituted by an anterior faith that Paul himself says he received from others. Keeping in mind that Paul learned of these things immediately after his conversion, we can date them to about A.D. 35, that is, five or six years after the death of Christ. It is thus a testimony of rare historical value.

The accounts of the Evangelists were written some decades later and reflect a later phase in the Church's reflection. But the core of the testimony remains unchanged: The Lord is risen and was seen alive. To this a new element is added, perhaps determined by an apologetic preoccupation, and so of minor historical value: The insistence on the fact of the empty tomb. Even for the Gospels, the appearances of the Risen Christ are the decisive facts.

The appearances, nevertheless, testify to a new dimension of the Risen Christ, his mode of being "according to the Spirit," which is new and different with respect to his previous mode of existing, "according to the flesh." For example, he cannot be recognized by whoever sees him, but only by those to whom he gives the ability to know him. His corporeality is different from what it was before. It is free from physical laws: It enters and exits through closed doors; it appears and disappears.

According to a different explanation of the Resurrection, one advanced by Rudolf Bultmann and still proposed today, what we have here are psychogenetic visions, that is, subjective phenomena similar to hallucinations. But this, if it were true, would constitute in the end a greater miracle than the one that such explanations wish to deny. It supposes that in fact different people, in different situations and locations, had the same impression, the same hallucination.

The disciples could not have deceived themselves: They were specific people -- fishermen -- not at all given to visions. They did not believe the first ones; Jesus almost has to overpower their resistance: "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe!" They could not even want to deceive others. All of their interests opposed this; they would have been the first to feel themselves deceived by Jesus. If he were not risen, to what purpose would it have been to face persecution and death for him? What material benefit would they have drawn from it?

If the historical character of the Resurrection -- that is, its objective, and not only subjective, character -- is denied, the birth of the Church and of the faith become an even more inexplicable mystery than the Resurrection itself. It has been justly observed that "the idea that the imposing edifice of the history of Christianity is like an enormous pyramid balanced upon an insignificant fact is certainly less credible than the assertion that the entire event -- and that also means the most significant fact within this -- really did occupy a place in history comparable to the one that the New Testament attributes to it."

Where does the historical research on the Resurrection arrive? We can see it in the words of the disciples of Emmaus: Some disciples went to Jesus' tomb Easter morning and they found that things were as the women had said who had gone there before them, "but they did not see him." History too must take itself to Jesus' tomb and see that things are as the witnesses have said. But it does not see the Risen One. It is not enough to observe matters historically. It is necessary to see the Risen Christ, and this is something history cannot do; only faith can.

The angel who appeared to the women Easter morning said to them: "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5). I must confess that at the end of these reflections I feel that this rebuke is also directed at me. It is as if the angel were to say to me: "Why do you waste time seeking among dead human and historical arguments, the one who is alive and at work in the Church and in the world? Go instead and tell his brothers that he is risen."

## ZENIT

If it were up to me, that is the only thing I would do. I quit teaching the history of Christian origins 30 years ago to dedicate myself to proclaiming the Kingdom of God, but now when I am faced with radical and unfounded denials of the truth of the Gospels, I have felt obliged to take up the tools of my trade again.

This is why I have decided to use these commentaries on the Sunday Gospels to oppose a tendency often motivated by commercial interests and help those who may read my observations to form an opinion about Jesus that is less influenced by the clamor of the advertising world.

| [More](#)

© Innovative Media, Inc.

Reprinting ZENIT's articles requires written permission from the [editor](#).