

Dramatic Missionary Growth

The Diocese of Rockville Centre's Call to Dramatic Missionary Growth: The Power of Praying the Gospel, Resurrection Appearances of the Risen Christ in the Easter Season

Most Reverend John O. Barres, STD, JCL
Bishop of Rockville Centre (Long Island, New York)

April 2017

All of us are in need of joyful resurrections in our lives.

Pope Francis expressed it this way in *The Joy of the Gospel*: "Jesus can also break through the dull categories with which we would enclose him and he constantly amazes us by his divine creativity. Whenever we make the effort to return to the source and to recover the original freshness of the Gospel, new avenues arise, new paths of creativity open up, with different forms of expression, more eloquent signs and words with new meaning for today's world."

Studying, praying and contemplating the Gospel Resurrection appearances of the Risen Christ opens us up to these new paths of creativity, new paths of transformation and new paths of *dramatic missionary growth* in the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

Consider Katie, a senior at an Oyster Bay area public high school. She was recently accepted to Notre Dame University in South Bend and will most likely major in Finance.

Notre Dame connects incoming students by social media so that they can interact and get to know each other a bit before they ever set foot on campus.

Through a series of online conversations, Katie eloquently witnessed in a natural way to the cosmic power of the Catholic Mass streaming through every dimension of her life and was able to convince, in a gentle and effective way, an incoming freshmen from Wyoming to come back to Mass.

When Katie told me this story at a recent Deanery Mass, I was so deeply moved that this winning and charismatic young woman had heard Pope Francis' call to be a missionary disciple and was setting an example for both her peers and every generation of Catholics of how to reach out in faith and in the spirit of the Divine Mercy to others.

I can imagine Katie and her classmate from Wyoming saying a prayer and lighting a candle together at Notre Dame's mystic Grotto at the center of campus sometime in August when they both arrive on campus.

The story of Katie and her Notre Dame classmate is a moving and inspiring challenge to each one of us to ask people to come home to their Catholic faith.

One of the ways we accept Katie's inspiring challenge is by studying, praying, contemplating and living the Gospel Resurrection appearances. This process of *lectio divina* rekindles a fresh Easter season fire to be missionary disciples of mercy to the world.

Consider for a moment the kaleidoscope of Resurrection appearance Gospel passages that the Church will lovingly present to us in the Easter season.

They lead us from the closed doors of fear to the open doors of Resurrection joy and bold evangelization.

Think of Luke 24 and the two men in dazzling garments saying to the women before the empty tomb: "Why do you seek the living one among the dead? He is not here, but he has been raised." We are called to allow the Holy Spirit to roll away the stones of pride and ego from our lives so that we can be deeply committed to new levels of Resurrection conversion.

Think of John 20 and Mary Magdala discovering the empty tomb in the dark and her running to tell Simon Peter and John and in turn John and Peter running to the tomb in wonder, hope and expectation. We are called to have Mary's urgency in bringing the joyful truth of Resurrection joy to others.

Think of Jesus addressing Thomas in John 20: "Put your finger here and see my hands, and bring your hand and put it into my side, and do not be unbelieving, but believe." And then we hear Thomas' emotional profession of faith which is so often connected to our belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist: "My Lord and my God!" We are called to touch the glorified wounds of the Risen Christ and to let him touch with his healing power the wounds and traumas we have experienced in life.

Think of the Risen Christ in John 21 appearing to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias after a frustrating night of fishless fishing. The Risen Lord says very simply: "Cast the net over the right side of the boat and you will find something." That "something" was a miraculous catch of fish, followed by a breakfast of bread and fish cooked on a charcoal fire. This passage concludes with Jesus asking Simon Peter three times: "Simon, Son of John, do you love me?" – an experience of mercy and forgiveness for Peter as it echoed and paralleled his three-fold denial of the Lord. We are called to cast the nets of the New Evangelization every day and every moment, knowing that the Risen Lord will lead us to miraculous catches.

Think of the two disciples in Luke 24 who meet Jesus on the Road to Emmaus and whose hearts burn with the Risen Lord's explanation of the Scriptures and who recognize him at the breaking of the bread. We are called to the biblical and Eucharistic amazement that lights our lives and our souls on fire.

Think of the description of St. Paul's encounter with the Risen Lord in the 22nd chapter of the Acts of the Apostles and the words of Jesus to him: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me...I

am Jesus the Nazorean who you are persecuting.” It is the Risen Lord who transforms Saul the Christian persecutor into Paul the unstoppable missionary. We are called to live the spirit of Christ expressed by Paul in Galatians 2:20: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

Every time we pick up a Scripture passage to pray, a fire is ignited in our soul -- a fire of purification, transformation and conversion.

These Gospel appearances of the Risen Christ help us to rediscover the areas of our souls and daily lives that need a resurrection in Christ’s Risen Love.

They help us to respond to Katie’s inspiring challenge to be instruments of *dramatic missionary growth* in the Diocese of Rockville Centre and beyond.