

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER [B]

In his poem, 'The Cast Of Christmas Reassembles For Easter,' the poet and writer Steve Turner has a very arresting, and sometimes disturbing way, of connecting Christmas to Easter.

Especially so in the stanza: "Mary? She can move to the front. We have a special section reserved for family and friends. Tell her that we had to cut the manger up. We needed the wood for something else."

The last line of the poem says: "Baby Jesus. Step this way please. My! How you've grown!" I've been a Christian for 43 of my 61 years; but that poem has, after all that time, helped me to realise clearly what the link is between Christmas and Easter.

And the link is when the Angel of the Lord tells Joseph that the child Mary has conceived is of God – and is God – and that: "His name shall be called Emmanuel (which means, God with us.) [Mt. 1: 23](#)

For all these years I've – almost subconsciously – thought that the Resurrection appearances of Jesus were as if He was there, but not really.

As if He nipped back and forth from heaven just to reassure His Disciples, and prepare them for the time, after His Ascension, when they wouldn't see Him anymore.

But didn't Jesus promise us at His appearance to Thomas, when He showed him the wounds of His Crucifixion, that: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." [Jn. 20: 29](#)

We are not disadvantaged because we haven't seen the Risen Jesus as the Disciples did.

Indeed, we're blessed: we have that assurance from the lips of the Risen Jesus Himself.

I think we labour under the misapprehension that, because Jesus has ascended to His Father, He's somehow out of our reach.

Hopefully, we timidly pray, perhaps we'll get a glimpse of Jesus when we die.

We may just peek at Him through the gates of Heaven; but I'm not good enough to gain entrance.

I believe that perception of Jesus is deeply ingrained into the psyche of Catholic Christians; but it needn't be that way.

And it certainly isn't the relationship Jesus wants us to have with Him.

It's not the intention of Luke and John, whom we've just heard from, to present us with that kind of cold, arms-length picture of God in Christ.

Otherwise, why would John at the end of his Gospel say that he wrote it specifically: "That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." [Jn. 20: 31](#)

Life: not just existence, or life for this life only.

Jesus came: "That [we] may have life, and have it abundantly." [Jn. 10: 10](#)

Jesus is so committed to giving eternal life to each of us that He willingly laid down His life to gain that life for us.

He rose from the dead to take the fear out of death, so that we need not be fearful of life in this world, or in the world to come.

For: "The last enemy to be destroyed is death." [1 Cor. 15: 26](#)

And the Resurrection of Jesus – not like a ghost or figment of the Disciples imagination – but bodily, is the great guarantee of that victory over death.

But let's take a step back to Good Friday: with the death of Jesus, the hope of all those who had put their trust in Him seemed doomed.

But this hope can't be extinguished by the darkness of death, because Jesus passed through this mortal flesh to open for us a path to the kingdom of life.

For a moment Jesus seemed vanquished: darkness had invaded the land, the silence of God was complete; hope, a seemingly empty word, buried with Jesus in the tomb..

But, on the dawn of the first day of the week, the tomb is found empty.

Jesus then shows himself to Mary Magdalene, to the other women, to his Disciples; then faith is born anew. Now it's more alive and strong than ever, now invincible since it's based on the decisive experience that: "Life's own champion, slain, now lives to reign – Dux vitae mortuus regnat vivus."

The decisive experience of those who met the Risen Jesus: and they testify to us about the victory of life over death, love over hatred, mercy over vengeance.

Because Jesus is risen, He is someone in whom we can put absolute trust, for He doesn't belong to the past, but is present today, alive.

Alive: not just in a particular place or time so that only a small number of people can encounter Him as they did when He walked this earth.

We are indeed blessed, although we haven't seen Him in the flesh, because He's risen, and is living in His Body, the Church.

Here, we can hear Him, touch Him, taste Him, experience His love for us through His indwelling Spirit graced to us in our Baptism and Confirmation.

We hear His living voice speaking to us through the words of Scripture, and the teaching of His Church.

We can touch the living Jesus when we receive Him into our hands at Communion.

We can taste the living Jesus when eat His Body and drink His Blood in Communion.

So, in company with John, writing to us in his First Letter, we too can know Jesus: "The one who existed from the beginning, whom we have heard and seen, whom we saw with our own eyes and touched with our own hands. He is the Word of life. This one who is life itself was revealed to us, and we have seen him. And now we testify and proclaim that he is the one who is eternal life." 1 Jn. 1: 1 – 2

Then, like the two Disciples on the road to Emmaus: "Our hearts [will] burn within us."

Lk. 24: 32 when Jesus opens up the Scripture to us, and feeds us with His Body and Blood in this Eucharist.