



SAINT LOUIS ABBEY



Easter Octave 2006

Fr. Augustine Wetta, O.S.B.

Christus surrexit! Christus vere surrexit! Christ is risen! Christ is truly risen!

Today is the sixth day of the eight-day feast of Easter. Every night this week, we get to eat dessert in the monastery, and there's a huge tin of Sarah Igoe's cookies on the counter in the refectory. I've eaten so much chocolate, my eyes are starting to cross. So if the monks seem a little hyperactive this week, you know why. But that's not the only reason we're excited. You see, after the long and somewhat dreary celebration of Lent, the full joy of this season is unleashed on us in one great wallop on Easter Sunday.

Nothing, I think, expresses so charmingly the ecstatic joy of Easter than this Gospel image of Peter, so excited to see Jesus that he jumps straight out of the boat at him. He can't even wait for his friends to row into shore. Imagine how utterly breathless with joy they must have been to see not only their friend, but all their hopes brought back to life! "It is the Lord!" says John. And Peter is so excited, he falls out of the boat! The funny thing is that even at this point in the story, they are not aware of the full impact of the resurrection. They don't realize that what they are seeing is the salvation of the entire world, their ticket to heaven! There simply is no reaction so ecstatic that it could match the magnitude of the miracle.

The other day, I was talking to a friend about all this, and he said to me, "Yeah, a story like that makes you want to tell someone about it." I keep coming back to that phrase: "...makes you want to tell someone about it." It does. It makes...it makes you wonder why there aren't more Christians in the world. Aren't we telling the story right? Aren't we telling it with conviction?

I was talking to another friend the other day, and he said to me something quite different. He said, "What makes you think you're right about all this? Don't you think it's just arrogant to expect that your religion is sufficient for everybody?" I've been thinking about that too. Because it's not just that I want to share this story. I want to convince other people of it. Because...it's more than a story. It's the answer to everyone's problems. This story is THE GOOD NEWS. "There is no salvation through anyone else," says St. Peter in the first reading, "nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved."

So I guess I just have to admit that...well...I think I'm right on this one. I have the answer to the world's problems! Should that strike you as arrogant? What ever happened to "tolerance" and "open-mindedness?" I guess I don't have an answer



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for that. If I'm right, I'm right. But then, it wasn't my idea to begin with...and I guess I can say this: If the story of Christ's resurrection isn't true, then my life has no meaning--and more than that, life itself has no meaning. Because when it comes to religious conviction I, as a Christian, am in a uniquely difficult position: I put all my faith in one historical event. "If Christ is not risen, then your faith is in vain," says Saint Paul.

Some people call this "The Scandal of Particularity." It's not just a matter of whether or not this is "true for me" or "true for you." It's a question of whether it's true *at all*. If Jesus Christ rose from the dead, then no other religion, no other philosophy, no other creed or conviction is sufficient. They might have some of the answer, but when it comes to the single most important event in the history of the world...they all fall short. If, on the other hand, Jesus didn't rise from the dead--if his resurrection is not a historical fact--then we all need to stop this foolishness right now. But I think he did, and if I'm right, *then people need to know*.

HOW do I know it's true? That Jesus is risen? I can't tell you. Perhaps it's the witness of all the millions of martyrs or the testimony of saints like Mother Theresa or Francis of Assisi. Maybe it's the two thousand years of theology and philosophy. Maybe it's the Eucharist that convinces me. Maybe it's the story. Maybe, in the end, it's just joy, that ecstatic, "unsatisfied desire that is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction." But when push comes to shove, I know that I am willing to die for this phrase--or better yet, to live for it: *Christus surrexit. Christus vere surrexit. Christ is truly risen. Alleluia.*