

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ and the Foundation of the Church



“Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen.” (Lk 24:5)

“Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” (Mk 16:15)

Prayer before Study

O ineffable Creator, true source of light and wisdom, origin of all things, be pleased to cast a beam of your radiance upon the darkness of my mind.

Take from me the double darkness of sin and ignorance in which I was born. Give me quickness of understanding, a retentive memory, the ability to grasp things correctly and fundamentally, and abundant grace of expression.

Order the beginning, direct the progress and perfect the achievement of my work. You who are true God and true Man and who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Christ is Divine

- ▶ The divinity of Christ is the most distinctively Christian doctrine of all, the likes of which are found in no other religion.
- ▶ This doctrine is the key to all the other doctrines of Christianity. Without it, nothing else matters and no other doctrines would make sense.
 - ▶ If Jesus was only a man, then who cares about anything he said or did?
- ▶ If Christ is divine, then his coming to earth is undoubtedly the most important event in history.
- ▶ If Christ is divine, our absolute obligation is to believe everything he says and obey everything he commands.

Christ is Divine

- ▶ To say that Christ is divine is to assert the following statement: ***Jesus Christ, though a man in history, was also fully God, God come to earth, the eternal Word made flesh.***
- ▶ As we have discussed, the Incarnation was the most astonishing, surprising, unforeseeable and unimaginable thing that has ever happened
- ▶ The immortal God, who has no beginning or end, became a mortal man, with a beginning (he had a mother) and an end (he died)
- ▶ The Author of all history stepped into the 'drama' he created and became one of his own 'characters' without ceasing to be the Author. The Creator became a creature.

Can the Divinity of Christ be proven?

- ▶ The question of what to make of Christ's personal identity can be summed up in three options
- ▶ Jesus made certain claims about himself which nobody but God could make.
- ▶ Jesus performs many supernatural works that give credibility to his claims, including the supreme miracle of his bodily Resurrection.
- ▶ What is a person to make of these claims? There are only three plausible answers:
 - ▶ Jesus is either insane
 - ▶ or a liar
 - ▶ or he is telling the truth and is therefore Lord.

Was Jesus insane?

- ▶ Jesus does not display any signs of insanity. He acts with deliberateness, reason and demonstrates an extraordinarily sharp intellect, especially in his intellectual sparring matches with the scribes and Pharisees.
- ▶ He is fully in control of all his faculties and does everything he does quite intentionally without any signs of delusion.
 - ▶ In other words, he has the wrong psychological profile to be considered insane.
- ▶ *“The size of the gap between what you are and what you think you are is a pretty good index of your insanity. If I believe I am the best writer in America, I may be an egotistical fool, but I am not insane. If I believe I am Napoleon, I am probably near the edge. If I believe I am the archangel Gabriel, I am probably well over it. And if I believe I am God?...Would you send your children to Sunday school to be taught by a man who thought he was God?”*
-Handbook of Christian Apologetics, Kreeft & Tacelli, p. 155

Could he have been lying?

- ▶ The main argument against the possibility of Christ being a liar is his eminent trustworthiness.
- ▶ Everyone who reads the Gospels agrees that Jesus was a good and wise man, a great and profound teacher.
- ▶ Most nonreligious people, and even many people of other religions, like Gandhi, see him as history's greatest moral teacher.
- ▶ But how can he be a great moral teacher on the one hand and yet lie about who he is?

Could he have been lying?

- ▶ The fact that it is unlikely that Jesus is a liar does not mean it is not possible; many otherwise good people get caught in lies all of the time. Why is this situation any different?
 - ▶ Nobody willingly dies for what they *know* to be a lie, especially the death of crucifixion.
 - ▶ Jesus maintained his claims to the very end, even on the threshold of death.
 - ▶ It is out of keeping with everything else we know about Jesus.
- ▶ *“Everybody agrees that Jesus is a trustworthy teacher. Therefore, what a trustworthy teacher teaches can be trusted. If he is trustworthy, then we should trust him, especially about his own identity. ...If there is any one thing that disqualifies a person from being trustworthy, it is not knowing himself. A man who thinks he is God when he is not God clearly does not know himself!”*
Handbook of Christian Apologetics, Kreeft & Tacelli, p. 155

Jesus is Lord

- ▶ This leaves us with one alternative: if he is not a liar or insane, then the only alternative left to us is that he was telling the complete truth about who he was and deserves our complete obedience.
- ▶ If he is Lord, then several things follow:
- ▶ Every word he says is truth.
- ▶ We must give obedience to all of his moral commands.
- ▶ We must take very seriously the teachings of those appointed by him, of whom he said: “He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Luke 10:16).
- ▶ What we do with Christ determines our relationship to God.
- ▶ And if he is Lord, we have found the conqueror of death and the way to eternal life!

The Resurrection

- ▶ The resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community and handed down through the centuries to us today.
- ▶ We speak of the resurrection as a real, historical event – namely that Jesus Christ was dead and that he rose bodily to new life.
 - ▶ We do not mean a mystical, mythical, new-age-y spiritual rebirth to oneness with the universe
 - ▶ Rather a physical resurrection – from death to life.

The Resurrection

- ▶ It was not a return to a normal earthly life (resuscitation), such as happened to Lazarus (Jn 11:43), Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:42) and the young man of Naim (Lk 7:14).
 - ▶ Jesus brought all of them back to life, but they would again die
- ▶ Jesus' resurrection was entirely different. In his risen body, he passes from the state of death to another life beyond time and space.
- ▶ We sometimes refer to this as a glorified state or a glorified body.
- ▶ He is no longer bound by the constraints of his humanity (which he still maintains) but now also embraces the fullness of his divine glory.

The Resurrection

- ▶ The resurrection was the subject of the very first homily ever given and remains the basis of the Christian proclamation:
- ▶ “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good and healing all those oppressed by the devil. We are witnesses of all that he did. They put him to death by crucifying him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day, and granted that he be visible to us, the witnesses chosen by God, we who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. To him all the prophets bear witness, that everyone who believes in him will receive forgiveness of sins through his name.” –St. Peter (Acts 10:38-43)
 - ▶ See also Acts 2:22-24; 3:15, 4:10, 5:30, etc.

The Resurrection

- ▶ “For what I received I pass on to you: that Christ died for our sins, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day, that he appeared to Peter, then to the Twelve, then to more than 500 of the brethren, and then to me.” – St. Paul 1 Cor 15:3
- ▶ “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands, we proclaim now to you, so that you may have fellowship with us, for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.” – St. John 1 Jn 1:1

The Resurrection

- ▶ Our entire faith depends on the resurrection. Otherwise Jesus was just a nice man who said nice things...or worse, he was insane or a liar.
- ▶ “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is in vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all.” 1 Cor 15:17

Arguments against the Resurrection

1. Jesus did not die. Rather, he passed out or was comatose and they only thought he was dead.
2. The Resurrection was a conspiracy theory by the apostles and others. They made it all up.
3. The Resurrection is a mythic story not meant to be taken literally
4. The Resurrection was a hallucination

Refutation of the coma theory

- ▶ Jesus could not have survived crucifixion. Period. The Romans knew what they were doing.
 - ▶ His legs were not broken (the soldiers *knew* he was dead). (Jn 19:33)
 - ▶ John saw Jesus stabbed by a soldier's lance and blood and water flow from his pierced heart. (Jn 19:34)
 - ▶ Pilate made sure Jesus was dead before releasing his body to Joseph of Arimathea (Mk 15:44-45)
- ▶ His appearances convinced the disciples that he was gloriously alive. A half-dead, staggering sick man who has just had a narrow escape is not worshipped fearlessly as divine Lord and conqueror of death.

Refutation of the coma theory

- ▶ Jesus came to die. This was the reason for his Incarnation
 - ▶ “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mk 10:45)
 - ▶ He predicted his own death (and resurrection) numerous times: Mt 16:21-23; Mt 17:23-23; Mt 20:17-19; Mk 8:31-22; Mk 9:30-32; Mk 10:32-24; Lk 9:21-22; Lk 9:43-45; Lk 18:31-34; Jn 12:20)
- ▶ Jesus’ death was a central part of the Apostles’ preaching. If he did not die, then he did not pay for our sins and he did not reverse the sin of Adam.

Excursus: Jesus' descent into hell

- ▶ The Nicene Creed and the Apostles' Creed declare that after death, Jesus “descended to the dead” or “descended into hell”
- ▶ By this, we do not mean the realm of the condemned and eternally damned (Hebrew: *Gehenna*)
- ▶ Rather, we mean the realm of the physically dead, the grave: *Hades* (Greek) or *Sheol* (Hebrew)
- ▶ “Jesus, like all men, experienced death and in his soul joined the others in the realm of the dead. But he descended there as Savior, proclaiming the Good News to the spirits imprisoned there.” (1 Pt 3:19, CCC 632)

Refutation of the Conspiracy Theory

- ▶ There were more than 500 witnesses of the resurrected Christ (1 Cor 15:3-8, also cf. Acts 1:22) Only one of them had to deny his story under worldly inducements, or still more because of possible imprisonment, torture and death, and they would all have been lost.
- ▶ If they made up the story, they were the most creative, clever, intelligent fantasists in history. Fishermen's "fish stories" are never that elaborate, that convincing, that life changing, and that enduring.
- ▶ They willingly died for their "conspiracy." Nothing proves sincerity like martyrdom.
 - ▶ All of the 12 Apostles, except John (exiled), were martyred. Plus Paul, Mark, Luke, Timothy, Titus, Barnabas...

Refutation of the Conspiracy Theory

- ▶ There could be no possible motive for such a lie. Lies are always told for some selfish advantage. What advantage did the “conspirators” derive from their “lie”?
- ▶ They were hated, scorned, excommunicated, imprisoned, tortured, exiled, crucified, skinned alive, burned, beheaded, disemboweled and fed to lions – hardly a catalog of perks!
- ▶ They gained nothing (earthly) and lost everything (earthly) because of their faith and proclamation of the risen Christ.

Refutation of the Hallucination Theory

- ▶ As we have said, there were too many witnesses.
- ▶ Hallucinations last a few seconds, not forty days.
- ▶ They touched Him (Jn 20:24, 29). He ate food (Lk 24:36-43). He had long conversations with many men at the same time (Lk 24:13-35; Acts 1:34); He had been seen by all who were present, not just some of them (Mk 16:14; Jn 24:36, 50). No hallucination in history ever behaved like that.
- ▶ No hallucination ever had such power to transform lives and to give love, joy, peace, hope and meaning to millions of people for thousands of years, nor conquer the Roman Empire.
- ▶ Pascal: “If Christ was not risen and present, who made the apostles act as they did?”

Refutation of the Myth Theory

- ▶ The style of the Gospel is radically different from mythical literature. Scripture gives concrete evidence, set in a specific time and place in history.
 - ▶ “We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we have been eyewitnesses of his majesty.” (2 Pt 1:16)
- ▶ No time for the myth to develop. The disciples began immediately to proclaim the risen Christ. The resurrection did not come from their faith; their faith came from the resurrection
- ▶ Again, too many witnesses of the risen Christ.
- ▶ No one suffers poverty and persecution for a myth, and certainly no one dies for a myth.

Jesus Christ is risen

- ▶ This leads us to affirm and proclaim that Jesus Christ died and rose again.
- ▶ That everything He said was true
- ▶ That he is almighty God and Lord of Heaven and earth
- ▶ That the sins of all humanity have been forgiven and wiped away through his saving death
- ▶ That whoever believes in him will not die but will have eternal life (Jn 11:26)
- ▶ That he is with us always, even until the end of the age (Mt 28:20)

Jesus Christ is risen

- ▶ Our Catholic faith is not a philosophy or a way of thinking, nor can it be reduced to a set of rules or moral laws
 - ▶ Of course, we have those things, but our faith cannot be reduced to those things. A way of thinking doesn't save us. We don't pray to a philosophy...
- ▶ Our faith is about a Person – Jesus Christ – the Incarnate Son of God, who out of love for us died and rose again, who lives and reigns, who is the way, the truth and the life, who offers us forgiveness of our sins, grace to lead a holy life in imitation of him, and who offers us eternal salvation. In him we live and move and have our being. We do not follow a moral code – we follow him. All that we do, we do for him. Our hope is not in a philosophy – it is in him. We give our whole life to him, for through him we were made and redeemed, and we were created to share his life forever. He himself is our destiny and our inheritance. We love him for his own sake and our neighbor for love of him. Jesus Christ is everything to us.

Scriptural claims about Jesus

- ▶ The early credal formula “Jesus is Lord”: 1 Cor 12:3; Phil 2:11.
- ▶ The title “Son of God”: Mt 11:27; Mk 12:6; 13:32; 14:61-62; Lk 10:22; 22:70; Jn 10:30; 14:9.
- ▶ The New Testament calls him “God”: Tit 2:13; 1 Jn 5:20; Rom 9:5; Jn 1:1.
- ▶ Absolutely, universally supreme: Col 1:15-20.

Scriptural claims about Jesus

- ▶ Eternally preexistent: Jn 1:1; Phil 2:6; Heb 13:8; Rev 22:13.
- ▶ Omnipresent: Mt 18:20; 28:20.
- ▶ Omnipotent: Mt 28:18; Heb 1:3; Rev 1:8.
- ▶ Immutable: Heb 1:11-12; 13:8.
- ▶ Creates: Col 1:16-17; Jn 1:3; 1 Cor 8:6; Heb 1:10.
- ▶ Sinless, perfect: Heb 7:26; Jn 8:46; 2 Cor 5:21.

Scriptural claims about Jesus

- ▶ Has authority to forgive sins: Mk 2:5-12; Lk 24:45-47; Acts 10:43; 1 Jn 1:5-9.
- ▶ Rightly worshipped: Mt 2:11; 14:33; 28:9; Jn 20:28; Heb 1:5-9.
- ▶ Speaks the unique, forbidden divine name in reference to Himself. (“I AM”) Jn 6:35; 8:12; 10:9; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1
 - ▶ *Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.” (Jn 8:58)*
- ▶ Called “King of kings and Lord of lords”: 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14.
- ▶ One with the Father: Jn 10:30; 12:45; 14:8-10.

Scriptural claims about Jesus

- ▶ Performs miracles: Jn 10:37-38; and throughout all four Gospels.
- ▶ Sends the Holy Spirit: Jn 14:25-26; 16:7-15.
- ▶ The Father testifies to him: Mt 3:17; 17:5; Jn 8:18; 1 Jn 5:9.
- ▶ Gives eternal life: Jn 3:16; 5:39-40; 20:30-31.
- ▶ Foreknows the future: Mk 8:31; Lk 9:21-22; 12:49-53; 22:35-37; 24:1-7; Jn 3:11-14; 6:63-64; 13:1-11; 14:27-29; 18:1-4; 19:26-30.
- ▶ Is Lord over the Law: Lk 6:1-5.

The Ascension

- ▶ Scripture attests that after the Resurrection, Jesus spent 40 days with the disciples, after which he ascended into heaven (Mt 28:20; Mk 16:19; Lk 24:51; Acts 1:9)
- ▶ It was not an ‘undoing’ of the Incarnation. He ascended in his human body and remains united to humanity in his human flesh.
- ▶ “The Father’s power ‘raised up’ Christ his Son and by so doing perfectly introduced his Son’s humanity, including his body, into the Trinity.” (CCC 648)
- ▶ The Second Person of the Holy Trinity, God Himself, is forever human as well as divine, and bodily as well as spiritual. The incorporation of humanity into divinity was completed in the Ascension.

The foundation of the Church

- ▶ Just before the Ascension, Jesus commissioned the Apostles and sent them out to proclaim the Good News of his death and resurrection, that all who believe and are baptized might have the forgiveness of their sins and have eternal life.
 - ▶ Thus was the Catholic Church founded.
- ▶ “Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age.” (Mt 28:19-20)

The mission to evangelize

- ▶ The mission of the Church would be to proclaim to all the world the name, person, teaching, life, promises, Kingdom, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and to call all people to repentance, baptism and conversion to Christ for their eternal salvation.
- ▶ To make Jesus Christ known, loved and served – this is the Church's mission and is the very reason for her existence.
- ▶ It remains so today...

Next week...

- ▶ The One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church
 - ▶ The Deposit of Faith or “the Ball”

- ▶ Sources: NABRE, Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), *Catholic Christianity* by Peter J. Kreeft, unamsanctamcatholicam.org

- ▶ Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
- ▶ As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.