

Abide in Christ

Embracing the Risen Christ In All

By MOST REVEREND JOHN C. WESTER, ARCHBISHOP OF SANTA FE

As we continue to celebrate Christ's resurrection during this Easter season, our hearts echo with the words from Luke's Gospel, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?" (Luke 24:5). Luke is proclaiming to his community and to us that Jesus Christ is alive. Not only that, but He has passed into a completely new mode of existence. This is not a resuscitation, as incredible as that is, such as in the case of Jairus' daughter, the widow of Naim's son, or Jesus' friend Lazarus. No, this is the beginning of something completely new; not only for Jesus, but for all of us since Jesus made us heirs of His Father's love when He became one of us in the Incarnation. Like Lazarus, Jesus was also set free from His burial cloths and escaped from the tomb. However, unlike Lazarus, Jesus entered a new life, resurrected life, where He now sits at the right hand of the Father. Although you and I cannot completely comprehend this, like the women at Christ's tomb in Luke's Gospel, we can perceive with our earthly eyes and come to believe what the angels tell us. With Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary, the mother of James and the other women, the Scriptures challenge us not to look for Jesus among the dead but among the living. Furthermore, we are able to experience even now the first installments of the eternal life Jesus makes possible through the Church and the sacraments.

In other words, Luke is telling us that we are called to live our faith. That is, we are not to waste our time looking for Jesus in the tomb, but rather we are to go and report, to evangelize, and to give witness to our faith just as the women in the Gospel did. While this has many implications, one clear message is that we are to rid ourselves of our assumptions, of our biases, of our often-erroneous perceptions and in the process come to embrace the risen Christ. The women in the Gospel of Luke were not able at first to make sense of what was happening. They had to abandon their mistrust of strangers and believe in the two men in the tomb. They had to abandon their conviction that dead people do not come back to life, much less a resurrected life. They had to resist the social mores of the time that would mock the idea that the risen Christ, the Messiah, would speak to women before men.

Luke's message for his community and for us is clear. The resurrection of Jesus Christ moves us to see things in a completely different way, moving us from the tomb to the light of day where



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we are called to live our faith by finding Christ among the living rather than wallowing in our numbing and often deadly biases. Yet, this conversion is not easy! For one thing, we cling to those beliefs and assumptions that help us to make sense of the world and of our lives, even if they are erroneous. For another, it is not easy to discern what biases we have since they are so deeply ingrained in us. (I read the other day that a Swedish and U.S. study determined that 80% of drivers surveyed ranked their driving skills as above average. Think about that for a minute!)

Sadly, there are many modern-day examples of how our biases keep us apart and make it difficult for individuals or groups to realize their full potential. We recently read about the two black men who were arrested at the Starbucks in Philadelphia. We also know that women often face obstacles to success in our society. A report by an early-stage investment firm, Female Founders Fund, found that only 8% of startups funded by venture capitalists in the San Francisco Bay Area last year were led by women. Katherine Hays, the cofounder and CEO of venture backed Vivoom, an ad tech startup, said that she sometimes believes that if she were a 21-year-old male with a hoodie, her company would be even more appealing to venture capitalists. Her observation leads to another study that determined that males over 6 feet tall and who are handsome are consistently hired more, paid more and perceived as more powerful and successful. What I am talking about is our call to moral formation, shaping our hearts and minds to a new life in Christ.

While there are a myriad of examples of personal biases, there are also institutional biases that affect us as members of a society, a family, a company or an organization. For example, in his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis laments that economic structures often keep people enslaved. Speaking of trickle-down economic theories, the Pope rightly commented that these structures push people to the periphery and quite often relegate them to a life of poverty and misery. As we witness the decimation of the Rohingya people of Myanmar, the massacres in Syria, the never ending tensions in the Middle East and the abysmal prospects for so many of our children here in New Mexico, we cannot help but realize that institutional and systemic biases are at play. These are the sins of omission we commit out of ignorance and neglect.

Whether our prejudices and biases are personal or institutional, they keep us apart and they fragment the body of Christ. Christ's resurrection calls us to move beyond these biases and to embrace a new way of being in which we treat people with mutual respect, dignity and affirmation. Jesus taught us in His ministry and in His personal example that we are to break down the walls that divide us. For example, He was respectful and affirming of women in a society where they had little or no standing whatsoever. In Jesus' time, it

was truly a man's world. Yet, Jesus' parables often spoke to women as He used examples that gave them a voice and with which they would identify. As Fr. Jose Pagola states in his book, *Jesus: An Historical Approximation* (2014), "Jesus does not restrict Himself to an androcentric language that considers everything from the man's viewpoint. He also puts Himself in the woman's place and makes them protagonists of His parable." Of course, repeatedly, Jesus shows us by His example that we are to break through our biases as we reach out to the poor, the ill, the marginalized and the downtrodden.

Moreover, Jesus not only gives us an example of moving from the tomb of our biases to the light of day but He also sends us His Spirit whom we anticipate this coming Pentecost to enable us to shed our burial cloths of prejudice. The Holy Spirit enlivens our faith and enables us to unite with Christ and each other. The gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, courage, prudence, knowledge, understanding, piety and fear of the Lord) help us to break down the walls that divide us. The Holy Spirit sends us forth to find Christ among the living. As St. John Chrysostom, the second patriarch of Constantinople (344 - 407 A.D.) said so beautifully and alarmingly even for today, "Do you want to honor Christ's body? Then do not scorn Him in His nakedness, nor honor Him here in the Church with silken garments while neglecting Him outside where He is cold and naked. For He who said, 'This is My body,' and made it so by His words, also said, 'You saw Me hungry and did not feed Me and inasmuch as you did not do it for the least of My brothers, you did not do it for Me.' What we do here in the Church requires a pure heart, not special garments; what we do outside requires great dedication."

We must be dedicated to removing our burial cloths; removing the biases that prevent us from embracing the risen Christ in all His brothers and sisters. We will not find Christ in the tombs of our biases and prejudices but only among the living. It is when we treat each other with mutual respect, honoring the dignity inherent in each human being and seeing Christ reflected in them, that we are truly free. We are truly an Easter people who hope one day to live with Christ forever in the Kingdom He opened up to us in His Resurrection, and manifests daily in our love and care.

Sincerely yours in the Lord,

+ John C. Wester

Most Rev. John C. Wester,
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His Mercy
Endures Forever