

## **Item #90 (The Core of Being Christian)**

**Easter reminds us** that the Church begins with witness: lives changed by an encounter with the Risen Lord; men and women who then transform others by the power of their testimony and the authority of their example.

The Gospels are remarkably candid about the difficulty the first Christian witnesses had in grasping just what they had experienced. In John's Gospel, Mary Magdalene confuses the Risen One with a gardener (19:14-15). In Luke's Resurrection account, two disciples walk a considerable distance on the Emmaus Road without recognizing their risen and glorified companion (24:13-35). In the Johannine epilogue, seven apostles on the Sea of Tiberias take a while to grasp that it's the Risen Lord who's cooking breakfast on the seashore (21:1-14).

This candor about initial incomprehension bears its own witness to the historicity of the Resurrection. For what happened on the first Easter Sunday was so completely unprecedented and yet so completely real that it exploded the expectations of pious Jews about history, the Messiah, and the fulfillment of God's promises, even as it transformed hitherto timid followers of the Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth into zealous evangelists who set off from the edges of the Roman Empire to convert, over the next 250 years, a lot of the Mediterranean world.

The witness of radically converted lives has been the lifeblood of Christianity ever since, for at the bottom of the bottom line of Christian faith is the encounter with a person, the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Christianity is also about creed, doctrine, morals, worship, and all the rest-- but it is fundamentally about friendship with Jesus Christ and the transformation that engenders. And when it ceases to be that, it becomes the lifeless husk we see in twenty-first century Germany and other parts of dechristianized Western Europe. Where Christianity lives today, against all cultural odds, it's because of witnesses like those initially confused souls in Judea and Galilee whose conversion began with life-shattering and life-changing encounters with the Risen One.

The above words are an exact quotation from George Weigel, **Not Forgotten. *Elegies for and Reminiscences of, a Divine Cast of Characters, Most of Them Admirable.*** Ignatius Press. San Francisco, 2020. Pp. 164-165. (**James Swetnam, S.J., March 14, 2022**)