

## 'Let him Easter in us'

James Hanvey SJ

Our Lenten anticipation now gives way to our celebration of the resurrection of Christ, which 'is not something that we can master; it is only something we can receive'. James Hanvey SJ explains how the scriptural accounts of the appearances of the risen Christ can help us to see with Easter eyes.

We have reached our celebration of Easter, the centre of the Church's liturgical year and the source of Christian life and faith. Yet Easter often appears as the poor relation of Christmas. Whether you believe or not, there is something about Christmas that manages to touch everyone. But without Easter there would be no Christmas.

In many ways, Easter makes more demands upon us. The empty tomb is not like the manger: if we go there we do not find the beautiful, serene mother with her newborn baby, an adoring and gently protective father, and heaven and earth somehow caught in a silent moment of adoration. At the empty tomb there is, well, an absence, not a presence. So, Easter really invites us into something utterly new. It is rather frightening because it transgresses all our ways of thinking, what we know – or think we know – about the world and how we live in it.

We get used to 'knowing' in a particular way. We are uneasy with things we can't master or that don't match our categories. We're always trying to fit things into time, space, matter; even when we encounter something utterly new like 'dark matter' or particles that we know only by their traces, we want to fit them in to some familiar conceptual framework. But the resurrection of Christ cannot be fitted in like that. It is not something that we can master; it is only something we can receive. We can only let it transform us and our whole way of thinking and seeing and being. In a sense, we find the resurrection difficult not because we are so earth bound – the whole of creation



sings it; it is because we are so *self*-bound, we see only the problematic absence of the empty tomb.

Those strange [resurrection appearances](#) in scripture can help us if we will let them. If we throttle them with our questions and demands, they remain only silent and dumb. They wait for us to calm down, to release our control and quieten our fears. Then they begin to open to us, but on their terms.

They keep moving in and out of focus; at once they are astonishing in their simplicity, directness and even materiality, but they remain elusive. They describe a world we recognise, and yet it is a world that is now so different; it has a new reality and property which we cannot grasp even though it acts upon us and, indeed, invites us to so transform our minds, understanding and life, that we are left confused and stunned.

Like all those who encounter the risen Christ, it takes us time to adjust, to come into focus. You will notice that it is the risen Christ who comes to us, not we who can summon him. We must learn to wait with a new openness and humility – there is no other way of knowing him than by receiving him. You'll notice, too, in the delicate luminosity of the resurrection accounts there is no awe, no stunning effects to accompany a divine revelation. It is all quietness, stillness, simplicity and intimacy. This alone is uncanny and yet it tells us something about the way in which Christ always is with us.

Perhaps the most profound thing is the absence of recrimination. Jesus does not blame or punish his disciples for their betrayals. He never mentions it; with a beautiful delicacy he speaks to them by name, shares their food, consoles them, heals their doubts and calms their fears, and then gives himself to them. He actually trusts them with the truth about himself and places his mission in their hands. There is no looking back. They are called to journey into a new world and a new history. This is the unspoken grace of forgiveness and its freedom that he offers us.

At the end of John's Gospel is the encounter between Peter and the risen Jesus. No blame, only that question: 'Simon Peter, do you love me?' It is not only the forgiveness for his denials; it is the condition of his mission. Only when Peter, with all his broken history, can confess his love of Jesus can he confess his faith in him. For love is the only way to this sort of knowledge – not just knowing, but living and following. It is Peter's resurrection into life, into his true self; into who Jesus calls him to be. So, at some point in all our lives we will meet this risen Jesus and if we can only say. 'I love you' then we will begin to know what life really is. We will have Easter eyes.

*James Hanvey SJ holds the Lo Schiavo Chair in Catholic Social Thought at the University of San Francisco.*