

LESSON 24: THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Instruction for Faith Educators

For Basic Level / Age 8	:	Cover points 1 to 7
For Intermediate Level / Age 11	:	Cover points 1 to 7
For Advanced Level / Age 14	:	Cover points 1 to 18

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous lesson, we learned about how Jesus gave Himself as the final sacrifice for the sins of the world. He was the Lamb of God, the sacrifice offered for the Atonement as well as the Passover. In this lesson, we learn that even though He died and was buried, death did not conquer Jesus, because He is God! Therefore, He rose from the dead on the third day.

Current lesson:

1. Throughout the time that Jesus was dead as a result of the violent torture and murder that took place at the hands of the Roman soldiers, He entered into the realm of the dead that is referred to as “hell”. But this “hell” does not mean that Jesus was punished for sins that He did not commit, for we know that Jesus was the perfect man and He had no sin in Him.
2. To say that Jesus entered into hell means that He entered into the realm where the souls of the dead are present (CCC 632). This means that Jesus’ bodily death was real. But it does not mean that He went there to suffer punishment. Rather, He entered into that realm in order to preach to the souls of those who had died, to proclaim the Good News of what He had done for them by His passion, death, and coming resurrection (CCC 632). He went into this realm to proclaim victory.

In this realm of the dead, even the righteous people who had died were awaiting the possibility of being with God, since Jesus had not yet made it possible prior to His sacrifice. He therefore went into this realm to free them to enter into eternal union with God (CCC 633).

CCC 637: “In his human soul united to his divine person, the dead Christ went down to the realm of the dead. He opened heaven’s gates for the just who had gone before him.”

3. But Jesus did not die forever. On the third day after His death and burial, He rose from the dead and left the grave in which His body was buried. This rising again is called the Resurrection. His rising again was not an apparition or a ghostly appearance without a body. Jesus rose physically, and did not die again after that.
4. Read Luke 24:1-53 and explain it to the students.
Read Acts 1:9-11 and explain it to the students.

5. After His Resurrection, Jesus remained on earth for forty days. He spent most of the time with His disciples to help them to understand how everything that had happened actually fulfilled God's plan for humanity (Luke 24:27, 45). He also remained on earth in order that many could witness to the fact of His Resurrection.

With their faith restored and strengthened, Jesus' final instructions to His disciples was to "go and make disciples of all nations" by sharing with the world the great things that He had done. This was the message of hope that He brought for all mankind (Matthew 28:19).

6. After being with His disciples for 40 days, Jesus returned to the realm of God's reign (heaven). This return of Jesus to Heaven is called the Ascension of our Lord. The Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Ascension of Our Lord every 40th day of Easter, which is a Thursday.

CCC 659: "So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God.'..."

Just because Jesus has returned to the realm of Divine reign does not mean that He is no longer human. He is still fully human, in His Resurrected body, but also remains fully God and rules from heaven together with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

7. The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ explains to us why Easter is the greatest of all seasons that we celebrate in the liturgical year. St Paul said, "...if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is without substance, and so is your faith" (1 Corinthians 15:14). But since Jesus Christ is risen and alive, it means that our Lord has conquered death and hopelessness. We have a true hope and a true future! No problem in our lives is ever too big for God, who conquered death and rose from the grave! For this reason, the Church celebrates every Easter with a resounding "Alleluia!"
8. Jesus' Resurrection was not only the most amazing event in the history of humanity, but also one of the most hotly debated topics throughout time, especially by people who do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God.
9. Five possible explanations have been given to the Resurrection of Christ, by believing and unbelieving people:
 - A) Jesus truly rose from the dead, as the Christian faith claims;
 - B) Jesus did not really die on the cross; He probably just fainted;
 - C) Jesus really died, but His disciples (the Apostles) stole His body from the tomb in order to appear that He Resurrected;
 - D) Jesus really died, but He did not rise from the dead; it was merely a tale fabricated by His early disciples so that the lie/myth would be carried on in their lives and teaching;
 - E) Jesus really died, but He did not rise from the dead; perhaps the witnesses of the Resurrected Christ were hallucinating.

The above are five hypotheses that are possible. But if hypothesis B to hypothesis E are proven false, then it holds that hypothesis A must be true.

10. *Hypothesis B: Jesus did not really die.* Let us examine the explanation that Jesus did not really die on the cross, and that He probably just fainted or went into a coma. This is also known as the “swoon hypothesis”. For this assumption to be true, we have to believe that Jesus somehow survived His crucifixion. This is difficult to believe because the Roman executioners were expert killers. Furthermore, the execution was public, and the Jewish authorities were there to witness His death and make sure He was really dead.

One tactic that the Roman soldiers used to hasten a condemned person’s death was, they would break the person’s legs while the person was hanging on the cross. This was so that the person could no longer push himself up to breathe, and would swiftly die of suffocation. But we are told that they did not break Jesus’ legs, which indicates that they were certain He was already dead on the cross (John 19:33).

They also put a spear into His side to make sure He was dead. The fact that blood and water spurted out is a medical sign of death (John 19:31-37). Because of the amount of blood that Jesus had lost as a result of His torture, His heart worked extra hard in order to pump blood that was no longer there. As a result of this, water instead of blood accumulated around His heart. This condition is called pericardial effusion. This is why when the spear was thrust into His side and entered into His heart, blood came out together with water. Seeing that they did this to Jesus, He could not have still been alive.

11. Furthermore, it is incredible to believe that Jesus was scourged badly, nailed to a cross, and stabbed with a spear, then wrapped up like a mummy and placed in a tomb, but that He did not die (John 19:38-42). And we are supposed to believe that He somehow woke up again in a state of serious physical injury, unwrapped Himself, pushed back a 2,000-kilogram stone that blocked the entrance to His grave (which was like a cave), and stepped out into a cold spring morning. Furthermore, we have to believe that when Mary Magdalene and the other disciples met this half-dead man staggering around the garden naked, they thought He had risen from the dead. Common sense tells us that they probably would have called for a doctor instead!
12. There are people who argue that nobody actually saw Jesus dying because Matthew 26:56 said that “...all the disciples deserted him and ran away”. Whilst it is true that the disciples ran away from the immediate presence of Jesus, Mark 14:54 asserts that there were still witnesses from a distance, and one such material witness was Peter himself.

In John 19:26-27, it is shown that Jesus spoke to this “anonymous disciple” while he was on the cross, commending the Blessed Virgin Mary to him as his mother, and likewise, him to her as her son. Luke 23:27 also reports that while Jesus was carrying the cross, “Large numbers of people followed him, and women too, who mourned and lamented for him”.

In addition to these people mentioned above, the Gospels contain references to other eyewitnesses, such as, Jewish leaders (Matthew 27:41; Mark 15:31), the Roman centurion (Matthew 27:54; Mark 15:39; Luke 23:47) and soldiers (Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:35; John 19:18, 23).

The notion that there were absolutely no eyewitnesses to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ certainly does not correspond with the historical data available.

13. *Hypothesis C: Jesus really died, but His disciples stole His body from the tomb to appear that His Resurrection was real.* Upon the burial of Jesus' corpse, the Roman soldiers guarded the entrance of the tomb to ensure that His body would not be stolen. There would have been at least four men, possibly more, of highly trained soldiers. These soldiers were experts in torture and in combat, not easily frightened off by a band of fishermen and tax collectors. Had they fallen asleep or left their post, they would have violated the law, resulting in their own execution.

The stone that covered the entrance to Jesus' tomb weighed about 2,000 kilograms, and its size was at least seven or eight feet high. To roll away or lift that stone would have required more than just one or two men sneaking around the tomb. The tomb was sealed to ensure evidence that nobody had broken into it to steal Jesus' body. Clay was affixed to a rope (stretched across a rock) and to the tomb itself, and the Roman seal was pressed into the clay. Anyone guilty of breaking the seal would be executed.

These historical facts point to the impossibility of breaking into the heavily guarded tomb that held Jesus' body. Thus when the Apostles began aggressively preaching the fact of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ, as reflected in the Acts of the Apostles, and had their preaching been nothing more than a mere lie, these very opponents of theirs would undoubtedly have produced the corpse of Jesus to expose the lie of His Resurrection.

14. *Hypothesis D: Jesus really died, but His disciples fabricated the myth of His Resurrection.* Now let us examine the possibility that Jesus really died, but that His disciples fabricated the story of His Resurrection for some reason. Would they have done such a thing? And more importantly, would they have been willing to stick to their lie even when they were tortured and killed for it?

The Gospels tell us that Jesus' disciples were cowards. Except for John, they all ran away when Jesus was captured. Even after the Resurrection, when Jesus appeared to them, they were hiding in a locked room out of fear of the authorities. These were rather simple men, not the cunning and deceitful sort, and definitely not very intelligent. They had nothing to gain from concocting such a story. But they did have everything to lose. They went on to spend their lives spreading the Gospel, living in poverty, and finally dying as martyrs. Would they have done all this just for a fake story? Their martyrdom was an attestation to the truth.

15. Furthermore, if these disciples were lying, there were plenty of witnesses in Jerusalem who could have proven them wrong. The Jews would have produced evidence against them, or others would have told them they were simply mistaken. Again, those opponents of theirs would have produced the corpse of Jesus to expose the lie of His Resurrection.
16. Those of us who are well-read in Scripture texts as well as historical documents would be rather informed, and probably astonished, at the way in which the lives of the early disciples of Jesus were transformed after His crucifixion, death, and His Resurrection. The

transformation in them was so deep that a strong early Church arose from their convictions. People's lives do not get transformed by a lie about a man who did not actually die and rise from the grave, or a man who was found half dead staggering around the vicinity of his grave.

17. *Hypothesis E: Jesus really died, but His disciples hallucinated when they thought He had risen again.* A hallucination is an event that is merely a fiction of one's imagination. This means that the Apostles could have imagined they saw the resurrected Jesus, but it was just that, an imagination.

The problem with this possibility is that there were too many witnesses who saw the resurrected Jesus. Hallucinations are supposed to be private, individual, and subjective experiences. But Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, to the disciples (initially without Thomas), to the disciples again slightly later (this time including Thomas), to the two disciples at Emmaus, to the fishermen on the shore, to James (his "brother" or cousin), and even to five hundred people at once (1 Corinthians 15:3-8). St Paul even recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:6 that most of the five hundred were still alive, inviting any reader to check the truth of the story by questioning the eyewitnesses. The five hundred people saw Christ together, at the same time and place. This is even more remarkable than five hundred private "hallucinations" at different times and places of the same Jesus.

Hallucinations usually last a few seconds or minutes; rarely for hours. But the Resurrected Christ hung around the eyewitnesses for forty days (Acts 1:3). Hallucinations usually happen only once, except to the insane. But the Resurrected Christ returned many times, to ordinary people (John 20:19 to 21:14; Acts 1:3).

Hallucinations do not eat. But the resurrected Christ did, on at least two occasions (Luke 24:42-43; John 21:1-14). Not only did the disciples not expect His Resurrection; they did not even believe it at first. This included Peter, the women, and Thomas, as well as all the other disciples. When He appeared, they thought he was a ghost; but He had to eat something in front of them to prove He was not a ghost (Luke 24:36-43).

Hallucinations do not hold profound, extended conversations with those experiencing it, unless those people have serious mental disorder. But the resurrected Jesus conversed with at least eleven people at once, for forty days (Acts 1:3). The disciples also touched Him (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:27). They also spoke with Him, and He spoke back. If they were indeed hallucinating, then all of them must have been suffering from serious mental disorder at exactly the same time.

The Apostles could not have believed in the "hallucination" if Jesus' corpse had still been in the tomb. If their vision of the Resurrected Christ had been a hallucination, they would have checked for the corpse of Jesus; if it was there, they could not have seen what they had seen. Furthermore, we have also explained that if the Apostles had hallucinated and then spread their hallucinogenic story, the Jews would have stopped it by producing the body (unless the disciples had stolen it, in which case we are back with the conspiracy theory in *Hypothesis C* and all its difficulties). A hallucination would explain only the post-

resurrection appearances; it would not explain the empty tomb, the stone of the grave that had been removed, or the inability to produce the corpse.

18. In the light of the discussions above, we see why Hypotheses B to E cannot possibly be correct. Logic tells us that Jesus Christ, our Lord, truly died and truly rose from the dead.



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