

LESSON TWO

JESUS' APPEARANCES BETWEEN HIS RESURRECTION AND ASCENSION

Acts 1:2-3 until the day he was taken up (Ascension), after giving instructions through the holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen, Jesus presented himself alive to them by many proofs after he had suffered, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God

The truth of Christianity rests heavily on the Resurrection of Christ. If Jesus rose from the grave, who saw him? How trustworthy were the witnesses? Those who claimed to have seen the Risen Lord went on to turn the world upside down. And these are the blessed ones who saw the Risen Lord from the grave.

Mary Magdalene	Mark 16:9-11/ Luke 20:10-18/John 20:10-18
The other women at the tomb	Matthew 28:8-10
Peter in Jerusalem	Luke 24:34/ 1 Cor 15:5
The two travelers on the road (Emmaus)	Mark 16:12-13
Ten disciples behind closed doors	Mark 16:14/Luke 24:36-43/John 20:19-25
All the disciples including Thomas (except Judas)	John 20:26-31/ 1 Cor 15:5
Seven disciples while fishing	John 21:1-14
Eleven disciples on the mountain	Matthew 28:16-20
A crowd of 500	1 Cor 15:6
Jesus' brother James	1 Cor 15:7
Those who watched Jesus ascending into Heaven	Luke 24:44-49/ Acts 1:3-8
Ascension of Jesus	Mark 16:19-20/Luke 24:50-53/ Acts 1:9

1. JESUS' APPEARANCE TO MARY MAGDELINE AND OTHER WOMEN

Before we speak about Jesus' apparition to Mary Magdalene and other women, it is important to know the oppressive Jewish culture towards women and How Jesus sharply contrasted from his own culture and people. How did Jesus treat women? He treated women with great respect, compassion and dignity. How?

Jewish culture in the first century was decidedly patriarchal. The daily prayers of Jewish men included this prayer of thanksgiving: "Praised be God that he has not created me a woman." A woman's place was thought to be in the home, bearing and raising children. Men were not to greet women in public. Some Jewish writers of Jesus' time, such as Philo, taught that women should never leave the home except to go to the synagogue. A woman was almost

always under the protection and authority of a man: her father, her husband or a male relative of her husband if she was a widow. This left women in a very vulnerable position within Judaism. They had little access to property or inheritance, except through a male relative. Any money a woman earned belonged to her husband. Men could legally divorce a woman for almost any reason, simply by handing her a writ of divorce. A woman, however, could not divorce her husband.

In the area of religious practice, women were in many ways overlooked. Men were required to pray certain prayers daily, but women were not. While the study of Scripture was regarded as extremely important for men, women were not allowed to study the sacred texts. Rabbi Eliezer, a first-century teacher, is noted for saying, "Rather should the word of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman."

At the Temple in Jerusalem, women were restricted to an outer court. In synagogues they were separated from the men and not permitted to read aloud. They were not allowed to bear witness in a religious court. But Jesus defies these expectations on many occasions which have implications for us.

Jesus Speaks with Women in Public: First, Jesus refuses to treat women as inferior. Given the decidedly negative cultural view of women in Jesus' time, the Gospel writers each testify to Jesus' treating women with respect and presenting Jesus going against suppressing cultural norms of the patriarchal society. He recognized their dignity, their desires and their gifts. Jesus steps forward in a crowd of mourners to speak with the widow at Nain in public, and calls her son back to life (Luke 7:11-17).

He cures a woman who had been crippled for 18 years, laying hands on her in the Temple and saying, "Woman, you are set free of your infirmity" (Luke 13:12). When the leader of the synagogue becomes indignant that Jesus has healed a woman on the Sabbath, Jesus uses a title of particular dignity for her, "daughter of Abraham" (Luke 13:16). While the expression "son of Abraham" was often used to indicate that a male Jew was recognized as bound by covenant to God, women had never been called "daughters of Abraham." With this title, Jesus recognizes this woman as having equal worth.

In John 4:4-42, Jesus ignores two codes of behavior. He initiates a conversation with a foreigner, a Samaritan. In addition, this foreigner is also a woman. Her surprise is included in the narrative: "How can you, a Jew, ask me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink?" (John 4:9). Jesus not only speaks with her but also enters into a prolonged dialogue, a dialogue which recognizes and honors her thirst for religious truth. Ultimately, he reveals his identity as the Messiah. When his disciples return, they are clearly uneasy with Jesus' behavior. John

includes the questions they are afraid to verbalize: “What are you looking for? Why are you talking with her?” (John 4:27).

Jesus treats with Respect and Compassion: Jesus refuses to view women as unclean during menstrual times or any time with flow of blood. During these times, women were not allowed to participate in most religious rituals. Anything or anyone she touched was deemed unclean. The most dramatic story concerning a woman in this state is the account of the woman who had a flow of blood for 12 years (Luke 8:43-48). Luke emphasizes Jesus’ compassion for the woman by the way he situates the story. This frightened and suffering woman, who has been ill and consequently isolated for years, touches his cloak. Jesus turns his attention from the synagogue official to the woman. He wants to know who touched his garment. By religious norms, the woman’s touch—even of his cloak—rendered Jesus unclean.

She could have probably expected anger from Jesus for her public behavior but she was totally surprised by Jesus addressing her “Daughter,” telling her of that her faith has saved her and sending her in peace (8:48). Jesus recognizes the dignity of women in situations that seem by ritual law to demand judgment, for example, the sinful woman who anoints Jesus (Luke 7:36-50) and that of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11).

In John’s account of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:3-11), a trap is laid for Jesus. The scribes and Pharisees who bring the woman to Jesus present the case, the judgment and the punishment, and wait to see if he will reject the Mosaic law in favor of the woman. Jesus wisely evades the entire legal debate and confronts them instead with a more fundamental truth—that none of them is without sin. When the accusers have all left, Jesus speaks compassionately with the woman. He does not gloss over her sin, but in his refusal to condemn her, he invites her to a new place of freedom and a new image of herself.

Women Disciples: Jesus steps over expected boundaries between men and women by his acceptance of women as disciples. Unlike rabbis of his day, Jesus taught women about Scripture and his way of love. Matthew tells of Jesus’ mother and brothers asking to speak to him. “He said in reply..., ‘Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?’ And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers’” (Matthew 12:46-50). His use of both masculine and feminine words clearly indicates that some of his disciples were women.

The familiar story of Martha and Mary in Luke 10:38-42 highlights Jesus’ acceptance and blessing of Mary’s desire to learn. She is described as one who “sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak” (Luke 10:39). This is the typical position of the male disciple. To sit at the feet of a rabbi meant that a person was one of his disciples. Martha, on the other

hand, takes the expected woman's role of providing hospitality. Perhaps she herself thinks it improper for Mary to act as a disciple. Regardless, Jesus will not deprive Mary of her opportunity. "Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her" (Luke 10:42).

Of particular interest is the fact that Jesus not only taught women, but some women traveled with him and ministered to him. In Luke 8:1-3, Jesus is described as journeying from village to village, preaching and proclaiming the Kingdom of God. "The Twelve" were with him and several women: "Mary, called Magdalene, from whom several demons had gone out, Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, Susanna, and many others who provided for them out of their resources."

The gospel writer Mark, too, says of the women present at Jesus' crucifixion, "These women had followed him when he was in Galilee and ministered to him" (15:41). This picture of women disciples is astounding, given that Jewish women at this time were not to learn the Scriptures or even to leave their households.

Women were last to leave the place of Jesus' crucifixion and first at the empty tomb (Matthew 27:61; 28:1), indicating that the transforming power of Jesus had given the women courage and boldness to follow Him openly. In a marvelous display of the women's faith and God's approval, those women became the world's first witnesses of the resurrection (Matthew 28:8).

Lesson for us: The Gospels point us toward including women's voices and gifts. While we live in a time and culture far different from that of the historical Jesus, his way of welcoming and responding to women has much to teach us.

MARY MAGDELINE: She was the first to see Jesus after his resurrection. She was an early follower of Jesus who deserves to be called a disciple (Luke 8:2). An energetic, impulsive, caring woman, she not only travelled with Jesus but also contributed to the needs of the group. She was present at the crucifixion and was on her way to anoint Jesus' body on Sunday morning when she discovered the tomb. She is heartwarming example of thankful living. Her life was miraculously freed by Jesus when he drove out seven demons out of her. After which, in every glimpse, she was acting her appreciation for the freedom Christ had given her. That freedom allowed her to stand under Christ' cross when all the disciples except John were hiding in fear. After Jesus' death, she intended to give his body every respect. Jesus simply honored her childlike faith by appearing to her first and by entrusting her with the first message of his resurrection.

Like the rest of the disciples, She neither understood nor expected Jesus' resurrection and that is why she could not recognize Jesus at first. Her grief blinded her. When Jesus said his

name, she immediately recognized him. Famous quotation by Dale Carnegie goes like this “Remember that a person’s name is to that person, the sweetest and most important sound in any language”. When Jesus uttered his name, she understood immediately that it was Lord Jesus because she had heard many times Jesus addressing her before his death. We can imagine the love that flooded her heart when she heard her Savior saying her name. She could not control her joyful emotion of seeing Jesus back again. She held on to Jesus and Jesus said no. why did she hold on? She simply loved Jesus and she did not want to lose again but Jesus says that he has to ascend into Father in heaven to fulfil the scripture. He did not want to be detained at the tomb. Secondly if he does not ascend, How will the Holy Spirit descend upon the disciples? He will send the Holy Spirit on his arrival to complete the earthly ministry.

My Father and your Father/ My God and your God: If Jesus is God, Why does He call the Father My God? Any contradiction in his divinity / Divinehood ? Absolutely no

Here are two points to think about. First, Jesus isn’t merely God. Unlike the Father, He is truly God and truly man. He is the God-man. As the God-man, He is a perfect man, who worships, honors, obeys and prays to God the Father. In fact, the incarnate Son is dependent on the Father (John 5:30). How could the Son be dependent if He is God? The apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives us a glimpse into the Son’s humiliation:

“Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8).

In the incarnation, the Son sets aside His independent authority and heavenly glory. Instead, He humbled Himself by taking on a human nature. It is within this context that one must read the Jesus’ “my God” statements.

Second, the Father and the Son have different roles within the economy of the Trinity. There is equality in nature, but subordination in their personal roles. For instance, the Son submits to the Father, but not vice versa. Therefore, when God the Son calls God the Father “my God,” He is affirming His relationally subordinate role without denying His full deity.

2. JESUS’ APPEARANCE TO PETER ALONE: Luke 24:34 says that Jesus appeared to Peter alone and Paul also mentions in 1 Cor 15:5 about Jesus’ appearance to Peter. Why this special treatment? It could be because of Peter’s weaknesses during Jesus’ final moments. He distanced himself from Jesus and denied Jesus three times. Perhaps he felt completely unworthy after disowning Jesus but Peter repented though. Jesus showed individual

concern for Peter to pardon him, strengthen him and send him to build the church of Christ (refer the first part of the book of the Acts for Peter's role. Amazing Job by Peter)

Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? (John 21:15-23)

In the beach of Tiberias, Jesus led Peter through an experience that would remove the cloud of his denial. Peter had disowned Jesus three times. Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. When Peter answered yes, Jesus told him to feed his sheep. Love is not an emotion but a sincere commitment. Love needs to be shown in action. Peter repented from what he did and now he expresses his willingness to commit his life.

The Bible says that God is love and humans crave it from the moment of existence, but love describes an emotion with vastly differing degrees of intensity. Four unique forms of love are found in the Bible. They are communicated through four Greek words:

Eros (romantic and sensual love/physical attraction)

Storge (family love/ the affectionate bond that develops naturally between parents and children, and brothers and sisters)

Philia (love, care. Respect and compassion for fellow human beings which most Christians practice toward each other.

Agape (God's divine love. This is the highest of the four types of love in the Bible.

Agape defines God's immeasurable, incomparable love for humankind. It is the divine love that comes from God. Agape love is perfect, unconditional, sacrificial, and pure.

EXPOSITION OF THE TERMS AGAPE IN JOHN 21:15-17

15: When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love (**agape**) me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love (**phileo**) you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

16: Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love (**agape**) me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love (**phileo**) you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17: The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love (**phileo**) me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love (phileo) me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love (**phileo**) you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep".

Sheep: Sheep means those who love to do good for the sake of the neighbor

Lamb: Lambs mean those who do good for the sake of the Lord. In other words, Jesus asks Peter to show his love for Him and His church.

Jesus' prediction of Peter's death by crucifixion (John 21:18): Tradition indicates that Peter was crucified upside down for his faith because he did not feel worthy of dying as his Lord did.

Jesus' prediction of John's death (John 21:21-22): Early church history reports that after John spent several years as an exile on the island of Patmos, he returned to Ephesus where he died as an old man near the end of the first century.

3. TWO TRAVELERS (DISCIPLES) TO EMMAUS: Jesus was walking with them but they did not recognize him. These two men were counting on Jesus to redeem Israel- that is to rescue the nation from its enemies because most Jews believed that the OT prophecies pointed to a military and Political Messiah. They had not realized of Messiah redeeming people from slavery to sin. When Jesus died, they lost all hope. These disciples knew that the tomb was empty but did not understand that Jesus had risen and they were filled with sadness. Despite the women's witness, verification by the disciples and the Biblical prophecies, they still didn't believe

Jesus called them fools. Why? Even though they well knew the Biblical prophecies they failed to understand that Christ' suffering was his path to glory. After the two disciples had explained their sadness and confusion, Jesus responded by going to scripture and applying it to his ministry. When we are puzzled by questions and problems, we too can go to scripture and find authoritative help especially like this time of pandemic. If we, like these two disciples, do not understand what the Bible means, we can turn to other believers who know the Bible and have the wisdom to apply it to our situation.

Luke 24:27: Beginning with the promised offspring in Genesis (Gen 3:15) and going through the suffering servant in Isaiah (Isaiah 53), the pierced one in Zechariah (Zech 12:10) and the messenger of the covenant in Malachi (Malachi 3:1), Jesus introduced these disciples to the OT. Christ is the thread woven through all the scriptures, the central theme that binds them together. Christ is the center of the entire scriptures. We read in Mt 5:17-18 Jesus telling us clearly how he came to fulfill the Law (the Scripture)

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. Amen, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or the smallest part of a letter will pass from the law, until all things have taken place” Luke 24:44: The Law of Moses, the prophets and the Psalms is a way to describe the entire OT. In other words, the entire OT points to the Messiah.

4. JESUS' APPEARANCE TO THE TEN DISCIPLES BEHIND CLOSED DOORS (Mark 16:14/Luke 24:36-43/John 20:19-25). The disciples were frightened and startled. When they saw Jesus they thought that he was a ghost. Jesus cleared their fear and doubt by asking them to

touch him and he showed his hands and feet and he ate with them. What a beautiful scene to encourage the fearful disciples.

5. JESUS' APPEARANCE TO ST. THOMAS (John 20:24-29): Thomas is often identified and called as doubting Thomas. Doubting is not something bad. There are many doubters in the Bible. Abraham and Sarah doubted when God told them that they would have a son in their old age. Moses doubted when God told him to return to Egypt to lead the people. The Israelites doubted when they faced difficulties in the desert. Gideon doubted when God told him that he would be judge and leader. Zachariah doubted when God told him that he would be a father in old age. Even our Blessed Mother doubted when Angel announced the birth of Jesus the Messiah. Like all these people Thomas also doubted when Jesus had risen from the dead. We must note that God used all these real doubters to accomplish for greater things.

Doubt is not opposite of faith but it is an element of faith. It helps our thinking. It sharpens our mind. It allows us to pose question and get an answer and push for a decision. Thomas was a doubter but his doubts had a purpose. He wanted to know the truth. He wanted to be sure. Once he was sure, he would do anything for his faith. Hence we can say that doubting was not his way of life but only his way of responding to people and situations.

St. Thomas is most prominent in John's Gospel. The writer of this gospel beautifully brings out the true character of Thomas. One of the first times that Thomas shows his great character is on the occasion of Lazarus' illness. Our Lord Jesus announced to the disciples that he intended to go to his friend and console the mourning family. The other disciples were afraid of death threats to Jesus and to them as well as the Jews were planning to stone at Jesus. Only Thomas was willing to accompany Jesus in this perilous journey saying in John 11:16 "Let us also go, that we may die with him". That shows Thomas' true love for Christ.

Later in John 14:6 Jesus talks to the disciples of how he is going to prepare a place for them in his father's house. He tells them that they "know the way to the place where they are going". But Thomas looks ambiguous and says, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, how we can know the way?" Only it is here that we receive the wonderful reassurance from Christ, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life".

Again in John 20 we read the Risen Lord appearing to the disciples for the first time. We don't know why Thomas was absent for the first time. William Barclay, the biblical commentator, says that Thomas was not there present because he sought loneliness rather than company of disciples as the death of Jesus was painning him a lot. It is this time Jesus appeared to the disciples when Thomas was not there. It was quite natural for Thomas to

doubt the appearance of Jesus and to say that, “unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my hand in his side, I will not believe” (John 20:27). A week later Risen Christ actually stood amongst them in the locked room, bringing a greeting of peace, and invited Thomas to indeed touch his wounds. This time his doubt disappeared. His heart ran out in love and devotion. All he could say was “My Lord and My God”. Thomas’ is a beautiful manifestation of faith which we profess at the holy mass when priest elevates the Holy Eucharist in his hand. It was not by chance that Thomas was absent but it is all God’s plan for Thomas to absent himself from the rest in order to manifest his authentic faith publicly and boldly for strengthening his belief, the belief of other disciples and the belief of every one of us. In a marvelous way, the disbelieving disciple, in touching the wounds of his master’s body, heals our wounds of disbelief. St. Gregory the great says “The disbelief of Thomas has done more for our faith than the faith of the other disciples”.

How to apply this great apostle in our life? He certainly provides very good company in our own struggles to comprehend the life and ministry of Christ. Like him, we are called to overcome our doubts, believe in the resurrection and put the Gospel to practice in our lives. It is better to openly and honestly confront our doubts than pretending that we know everything. Like St. Thomas, we should have boldness in expressing our mind. Like him, we have to surrender to Christ for clarity when we wrestle with confusions and chaos. Only then we will have peace in our mind and heart. St. Anselm coined the famous phrase, ‘Faith seeking understanding’. Certainly our faith needs understanding. Let us not have any more blind faith. Let us take encouragement from Thomas, that we can be faithful in our moments of doubting.

When we go through struggles, difficulties and doubts in our mind, instead of getting worried, let us look at Thomas and ask for his prayers so that like him we also will be able to have deep and profound faith. Although Thomas stumbled on few occasions in terms of his faith, He clearly understood Jesus’ mission command of "go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good news to all creation". We are grateful to God for the gift of St. Thomas, the founder of Christian faith in India.

6. JESUS’ APPEARANCE TO A CROWD OF 500 PEOPLE (1 Corinthians 15:6)

7. JESUS’ MISSION COMMAND BEFORE HIS ASCENSION: God gave Jesus authority over heaven and earth. On the basis of that authority, Jesus told his disciples to make more disciples as they preached, baptized, and taught. With this same authority, Jesus still commands us to tell others the good news and make them disciples for the kingdom. When someone is dying or leaving us, his or her last words are very important. Jesus left the world with these last words “all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.. therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the

Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you and surely I am with you always till the end of the world” The disciples were under his authority and they were to make more disciples and they were to baptize and teach these new disciples to obey Christ. Christ would be with them always. The difference between this sending and the previous sending is that in the previous mission, they were sent only to the Jews (Matthew 10:5-6) and this mission is worldwide as Jesus is the Lord of Lords, King of Kings.

We are to go, whether it is next door or to another country and make disciples. It is not an option but a command to all who call Jesus as Lord. We are not all evangelists in the formal sense but we have all received gifts that we can use to help fulfil the great commission. How Jesus is with us? Jesus was with the disciples physically until his ascension into heaven and then spiritually through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). The Holy Spirit would be Jesus’ presence that would never leave them (John 14:26). Jesus continues to be with us today through his Spirit.

8. THE ASCENSION OF JESUS: As the disciples stood and watched, Jesus began rising into the air and soon he disappeared into heaven. Seeing Jesus must have been a frightening experience but the disciples knew that Jesus would keep his promises to be with them through the Holy Spirit. Jesus who lived with the disciples, died, buried and rose from the dead, loves us and promises to be with us always. We can get to know him better through studying the Scriptures, praying and allowing the Holy Spirit to make us more like Jesus. Jesus’ physical presence left the disciples when he returned to heaven (Acts 1:9) but the Holy Spirit soon came to comfort them and empower them to spread the gospel of Salvation.

Conclusion: Everything feels uncertain at this time of Pandemic. we have no control over this pandemic/germs/lock down/ cases/ restrictions/ travels/ economy and ultimately inevitable death. We are worried but we are Christians and so what? How do we walk through this when it all feels daunting? We acknowledge our fears, a first step. The next step can be harder: Remember. We must remember that God enters into our anxiety and tells us to share our concerns with Him because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7), He will give us rest (Matthew 11:28-30).

The Bible describes a God who is not indifferent to the details of our lives. It describes a God who knows us personally, who cares for us deeply, and for whom nothing is out of His control. We live in a world broken by sin, and unfortunately, the consequences of sin remain. God isn’t content for us to continue to live in a broken world. That may be our present, but it is not our future. God gives us a promise that, in eternity, something better awaits. A world with no sickness. A place of security and stability. Loss and grief will no longer overtake us.

Death will no longer reign. And the God who made us will wipe away our every tear. God isn't content for us to continue to live in a broken world. That may be our present, but it is not our future. God gives us a promise that, in eternity, something better awaits. God is no stranger to suffering, devastation or carrying heavy burdens. God entered into our hurting world to rescue us. Through His Son, Jesus, He walked among us and experienced all we have gone through and will go through. Jesus says in the Gospel of John, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me". Through dying a humiliating death on a cross, He took the penalty for our shortcomings. Through His resurrection, Jesus has made the way for us to have a relationship with God. Because of Jesus, we have a hope that extends beyond the short window of our lives. And if we have experienced the forgiveness that Jesus offers, we can look to the future with peace and joy, regardless of the present circumstances.

The message of Risen Jesus is peace. Peace is acknowledging that the circumstances are bad and may get worse but, by trusting in Jesus, having hope in the midst of those circumstances. We have the opportunity to live unafraid because of a hope that isn't based on wearing a mask or the development of a vaccine but that rests in a relationship with the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ. Peace be with you