The new Shofar

He is risen! The Good News, as Paul tells us, is that He is "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep"—fruits which nourish us and the world even now.

EASTER 1

The Relevance of the Resurrection

Christ's glorified body tells us that the promise of eternal life which Jesus's death and resurrection has opened up for us results not in obliteration or negation, but transformation and glorification. After Easter, nearly every day brings another of Christ's resurrection appearances. This makes sense chronologically. But we still might be left wondering why Jesus chose to make these few extra little "pit stops" on his way to the right hand of the Father.

The Bible itself shows how the "empty tomb" narratives are not meant to "prove" the resurrection of Christ. The Gospel writers themselves note that it was possible to offer alternative explanations for why the tomb was empty. "His disciples came in the night and stole the body."

If Jesus wanted to *prove* He was God in the sense modern people seem to want, He should have come off the cross after he died. One of the strangest passages in the Gospels is in Mark 15:39: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" One would have thought that the moment of His death, the question of His divinity would have been decisively resolved in the negative. The one thing gods don't do is die. At the moment of His death, one would have expected the centurion to say: "Well, I guess this man was definitely *not* the son of God."

The crucifixion conundrum

And yet the early Church saw in the centurion's comment the paradox of their own message. They proclaimed Jesus the Son of God **not *in spite*** of His death on the cross, **but precisely *because* of it**. Thinking back on the Last Supper, they came to realize His was not merely a death, as though He had been caught up in political events beyond His control; it was **a *sacrifice*,** understood on the model of the sacrifice of the paschal lamb whose blood preserved the Hebrew people from death and was the first stage in their passage to freedom.

Therefore, if Jesus is not trying to *prove* His divinity by showing the disciples His resurrected body, what is He doing? Reassuring them, certainly, although that's what sending the Holy Spirit is for. After He ascends to His Father, they will still likely wonder: "Did we see what we thought we saw?" We encounter the Risen Christ every time we take the Eucharist, and yet we still wonder: "Was it *really* Him?"

Jesus's resurrection tells us about the "final times." Or to put this another way: it gives us the clearest revelation we have of what heaven is. As St. Paul tells the Corinthians, Christ raised from the dead is the "firstfruits" of what we too will enjoy if we remain united to His Body.

In death our life is changed, not ended

What do the resurrection appearances tell us about the afterlife? The first message is that, like Christ, we will enjoy a true *union* with God the Father, Son, and Spirit; and second, like Christ, in that union, we will not lose our bodily identity.

The resurrection appearances show the apostles that the Risen Christ is the same person as the man they knew as Jesus of Nazareth. He has in His risen body preserved the marks of the nails and the lance. The disciples recognise Him by means of familiar gestures: He calls Mary Magdalene by name; He breaks bread with them; He sends the disciples out for a catch of fish.

What might give Christians hope? First, the Trinity: three persons in one Being: a perfect unity which does not destroy the diversity of Persons, and a diversity of Persons which does not destroy their perfect unity. So too the promise is that we can be united to God and not lose our "personhood." Like the Risen Christ, we will still be the person we have been, *still united with those we have loved*.

What many people fear about death is the loss of the intimate connection with their loved ones. They think of it as "going away," as though going to heaven were like leaving Melbourne and moving to Perth.

But what does Christ's glorified body tell us? It tells us that the promise of eternal life which Jesus's death and resurrection has opened up for us results not in obliteration or negation, but transformation and glorification. All that is sinful in us and keeps us from loving God and loving others fully the way the Son loves the Father must "die." But what is left as "wheat separated from the chaff" is the true *us*. We do not lose those connections with our loved ones, even with the places we love. Those connections are deepened. Like Christ, who can be with his disciples in a new and powerful way, with those He loves anywhere at any time of the day or night, so too, St. Francis can be present in a special way to those in his beloved Assisi, but also to us. The Risen Christ prepares us for the Eucharistic presence of Christ in the world. But it also prepares us for the communion of the saints whereby, like Christ, we can be present with a new intimacy and transforming power in the world.

The challenge of any view of the afterlife is that, if it is so glorious, it can make this life seem meaningless. If the afterlife is so great, why not do whatever we can to just *get there*? The stories about Christ's resurrection and ascension send a different message. "Men of Galilee," the angels tell them, "why do you stand here looking into the sky?" They are supposed to go out, spread the Good News, baptise in the name of the Father, Son, and Spirit, and make present Christ's Risen Body in the world.

The resurrection appearances convince the disciples not only of the reality of the resurrection but also of Christ's new permanent presence in them and among them, especially in and through the work of the Holy Spirit.