

There is an old joke about an elderly Christian couple who were, after years of planning and anticipation, finally able to take their dream vacation to Israel and the Holy Land. Unfortunately, while visiting the reported tomb of Jesus at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the wife suddenly passed away, leaving the husband to make funeral arrangements. Upon meeting with a trusted mortician, the man was given two options. His wife could be buried in Israel for about \$3000 or her body could be transported back to the US for about \$20,000 and additional arrangements made there. Without hesitation, the man chose to have his wife sent home. When questioned as to his reasoning, the man said that he knew that one person had already risen from the dead at the tomb where his wife died and he didn't want to take a chance that there might be another. I don't know how my wife puts up with me either.

Our faith tells us that there was indeed a man who rose from that tomb and we gather this Easter Sunday in celebration of the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Sounds great doesn't it? Our Savior is resurrected. But how many of us really believe it? Do we truly and completely trust that Jesus of Nazareth died and is risen from the dead?

To have doubts is understandable. After all, we live in a world in which it is increasingly difficult to know exactly what we can or should believe. It seems that for every person saying one thing, there is always someone else who claims the exact opposite, and does so with equal certainty. According to one survey (Lifeway research), only 47% of self-proclaimed American Christians strongly agree in the Resurrection of Jesus. The historical event of Jesus' crucifixion by the Romans in the early first century is very rarely challenged by scholars or historians. However, what happened next to Jesus, if it actually was Jesus on the cross, has led two thirds of our world's population to conclude that Jesus was not resurrected and was not the Son of God. These differing views can be confusing and controversial and can leave us feeling as lost as last year's easter eggs.

So how can we Catholics speak of Jesus' resurrection with such conviction? I could begin by sharing more than a 100 biblical references that offer us some reassurance. But skeptics point to those passages as part of some grand conspiracy orchestrated by different authors, at different times, in different locations, that have somehow withstood the test of time. We could delve into the details of the eye-witness accounts of those who knew Jesus both before and after

his crucifixion. We would learn that the Jesus encountered after his time in the tomb could be physically touched, audibly heard, visually seen, and actually eat food. None of these witnesses believed that Jesus would rise from the dead before He did so. They all came to know him as the risen Lord when they recognized him as the same Jesus who died on the cross.

For me, the most compelling support for the resurrection of Jesus lies, not in the testimony, but in the actions of those first witnesses. Through their encounter with the risen Lord, once fearful and disheartened followers of the man Jesus became unwavering proclaimers of the Good News. Their willingness to endure persecution and even martyrdom for their belief in the risen Christ speaks to the sincerity of their conviction.

The fact that countless individuals were willing to stake their lives and reputations on the truth of the resurrection further underscores its significance as a historical reality.

But get this, those first believers not only proclaimed the Risen Lord, the first Christians believed and they changed the way that they lived. “They devoted themselves to the teachings of Jesus and to communal life, and to the breaking of the bread and to prayer. They replaced malice and wickedness in their hearts with sincerity and truth and they ate their meals with exultation, always praising God (Acts 2:42-47). And every Sunday was known to them as Resurrection Sunday.

We have gathered together today, because, like the early Christians, we too believe. But have we allowed our faith in the resurrection to change or direct the trajectory of lives? Do we believe? Do we really believe? If we do, then we have to ask ourselves how has that belief changed our lives? How are our lives evidence of the resurrection of Christ? At the very least, let us rejoice and rest assured that by his resurrection, our lives have been saved!