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# Let Loose in the World

Pat Fitzpatrick, CSSp

**W**e know what to do with the forty days of Lent — we accompany Jesus as he sets his face for Jerusalem. But what are we to do with the fifty days of Easter? In my early Catholic education, we did nothing with them. It all ended on Easter Sunday when Jesus rose from the dead and proved himself God.

And those post-Easter stories are so “all over the place.” An empty tomb with the stone rolled away, and nothing but linen cloths inside, is the first clue that something is afoot. Then there are the encounters and appearances: in Jerusalem at the tomb and in the Upper Room; on the road to Emmaus and in Emmaus itself; on the Mount of Olives; appearances back up north in Galilee by the lakeshore, and on the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. He’s the same Jesus they once knew — he calls them by name, he opens their minds to understand the scriptures, he shows them his hands and his side. Yet there’s something different about him — his disciples have difficulty recognizing him, they mistake him for the gardener, or a stranger who joins them for a walk. Thomas wants proof after he missed the first meeting in the Upper Room. Unless he can put his hand into the side of his Lord, he refuses to believe. Later, he and six of the other disciples wonder who is the person on the shore of the Sea of Galilee telling them where to find fish.

## A conversation

In John Masefield’s play, *The Trial of Jesus*, the following conversation takes place after Jesus has been buried:

“Centurion, were you at the killing of that teacher today?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Tell me about his death...”

“I thought he was dead by noon, and then suddenly he began to sing in a loud voice that he was giving his spirit back to God...”

“Do you think he is dead?”

“No sir, I don’t.”

“Then where is he?”

“Let loose in the world, sir.”

He was not in the tomb — they were not to look for the living among the dead. Where, then, was he? We might reply, in heaven at the right hand of God. Correct, but that makes him distant, far off, remote. So, if he wasn’t just in heaven, where else was he? Still at work in the world, still present to his friends.

He seemed to enjoy turning up in disguise. Mary Magdalene presumed she was talking to the gardener, until that “gardener” called her by name. The Upper Room disbelievers thought they were seeing a ghost until he asked them to give him something to eat. The Galilee Seven didn’t recognize him on the lakeshore.

## A story

I like the following story called *The Trouble with Christ*.

The doorbell rang while I was upstairs marking papers. Susan answered and I could hear their voices:

“Yes, sure, he’s in — doing some marking upstairs. Come in. He’ll be glad of a break.”

Glad of a break! Doesn’t she know it’s Wednesday night and the reports are due tomorrow and there are still those projects to be written up for the staff meeting and that memo from Joe that I promised to have an answer for by... “Yes, dear — coming.”

I wouldn’t have minded if he’d called beforehand and checked to see if it was okay to drop by. Maybe on the weekend you can do his spur-of-the-moment stuff, but on a Wednesday... “Hi, Gerry, welcome. Glad to see you.”

Did he notice it was only my lips that smiled?

Susan had already asked him to sit down, so I didn’t have to be a two-time hypocrite.

“Well, how are things?... Raining a bit recently, eh?... Days getting longer though.... What’s new in your life?”

Susan came in with tea and cookies. I didn’t offer him a drink. He’d have been there all night and I had work to do. Must be nice to have just a 9 to 5 day. He and Susan ping-ponged the conversation. The cookies and I got progressively chewed up. I wonder, did he see me steal that glance at my watch as I reached out with my left hand for a cookie I didn’t really want.

He wouldn’t have a second cup. It didn’t taste very good anyway. Finally he got up to leave.

“Well, just passing by and thought I’d say hello.”

“Sure,” I said, “any time, eh?”

So he left.

The trouble with Christ is he always comes at the wrong time.

The Risen One doesn’t make appointments. He makes appearances. Let loose in the world, he’s free to turn up anywhere, anytime. And that brings us to Pentecost.

## The Gospels give way to the Acts of the Apostles

He told his disciples not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the coming of the Holy Spirit. They joined in constant prayer and attended to some unfinished business — the election of Matthias in place of Judas. And then Pentecost day came round. On the cross he gave his spirit back to God. Now he gives that same spirit to his disciples.

The sound of a strong, driving wind filled the house. Tongues of fire came to rest on each of their heads. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak different languages. People from all over the known world heard them speaking in their own native tongues about the marvelous deeds of God. So filled with

the Spirit were they that their hearers were amazed and perplexed. Some of them attributed it to the fact that these speakers had been drinking too much new wine.

Ever since Pentecost the risen Christ belongs to the whole world and to every culture. His early Jewish followers had to let him go so that he could find a home and feel at home among the peoples of the world. They needed the outsider Paul to prise him loose from their ownership, to bring him out of his homeland, around the Mediterranean. Century after century the people who welcomed him in turn changed him. He became one of them and they in turn enabled him to transcend his own culture. And so it has continued. We are heralds of his Good News, aware that the people we meet reveal to us aspects of the gospel we carry that we have not fully appreciated.

The hope is that conversion will take place in the meeting: our conversion and the conversion of the people to whom we go. We can all do with a little more conversion, especially those of us in North America and Europe. “The doctrine of the Spirit has gone ‘homeless’ in the West,” wrote Pope Benedict XVI. Maybe that is why God is sending all the nations to us today. Vincent Donovan, CSSp put it this way when he spoke at a Spiritan retreat: “Jesus of Nazareth wasn’t black. He wasn’t white either. He was Jewish, a Middle East man, probably brown, in-between. But there is a Black Christ. There has to be. There’s an Indian Christ, a European Christ, an Irish Christ and an American Christ. Helping him because these Christs is our missionary work.”

### Sierra Leone and Bosnia

The Spirit of God fills the whole world. Some years ago a woman in a camp for people displaced by the civil war in Sierra Leone had lost her husband and her brother and had seen two of her nieces brutally beaten and raped. Asked if she could ever forgive those who committed these crimes, she said, “If I cannot forgive, how can we ever have peace again in this country?” A truly Spirit-filled woman.

Slobodan Milosevic died two months ago. His death, while on trial for war crimes against humanity in the 1990’s, recalls the detention camps, the torture, the ethnic cleansing, the bitter hand-to-hand and street-to-street fighting of a particularly vicious civil war. But out of it came the following event.

Vedran Smailovic was a Bosnian, a professional musician, the principal cellist of the Sarajevo Opera Theatre. One day he saw twenty-two people who had lined up for bread, shelled and killed, down the road from his apartment window. The next day, as the hungry lined up again for their daily bread, Mr. Smailovic got dressed in his black opera suit and tie and went down to meet them carrying his cello and a chair. He sat down in the rubble of the road — fragments of death and despair all around him — and began playing Albinoni’s Adagio. Day after day he came back to the same spot for three weeks with his cello and his chair, and played the same mournful melody. Today on that spot where he sat there is a monument of a man playing a cello. A monument to his refusal to surrender the hope that beauty could



Vedran Smailovic playing in the ruins of the National Library in Sarajevo, 1992.

Photo by Mikhail Evstafiev

be reborn in the midst of a living hell. Here was a Spirit-filled person who dug deep into his soul and found life when all seemed hopeless.

To stop with Easter, or to see it as the event whereby the Living Christ proved himself God, would be to leave it all up to him. It becomes our story when as heralds of hope and messengers of joy we proclaim his on-going presence in our world. For him and for us, “The tree of our defeat became our tree of victory/ Where life was lost, there life has been restored.”

The centurion was right — on Good Friday, Jesus gave his spirit back to God. But the centurion was only half right — let loose in the world, Jesus gave us his spirit too. Ours now to capture the power of that spirit from whatever direction it blows, to become windmills facing the prevailing wind, which can

change direction from day to day. We don’t capture it so as to keep it to ourselves. We convert it into energy, by becoming a breath of fresh air in the lives of others. ■

## Shades of Easter

Ahh! — the enemy in the washbasin,  
A wee ‘nit,’ seeking breeding place,  
Water attracts — stagnant for a ‘mossie’.  
Wham ... disintegration is sudden.

Little girls imaging their mom  
Chatter at the well, aware that  
Clear water is precious;  
Attempt to balance buckets on their heads.

In recent years, bottles, pails, containers ...  
Tall, wide, narrow ... lids off,  
Assemble near the altar,  
Threads woven from ancient devotion.

In the fifties, granny drilled us in the practice,  
Go fill carafes, from the barrel with the cross on it.  
Here, that Easter drill is in vogue,  
As an all year round ritual.

Sunday, rag-tag vessels congregate,  
An albed arm stretches over the ‘ones for the journey’.  
Homes are sprinkled, bedridden blessed,  
And ‘ufiti’ — evil spirits — are banished.

The routine finds deeper value,  
In a piety we may have let go of,  
But is here treated as an underpin,  
Connecting with divine protection:  
Casting shades of Easter across the year.

*Locky Flanagan, CSSp*