

## "There Ain't No Way"

Easter Sunday Homily, March 31, 2002

by Fr. Michael Dibble

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I've given the same Easter talk for about thirty years. So, if you were here last year, you can go into a kind of contemplative coma. But the reason I give the same one every year is (as some of you are probably kind of tired of hearing...) I taught high school and college for thirty years and the questions that the young minds asked convinced me that I had to talk about the resurrection of Christ in this way, if only for myself, I had to.

So, about the resurrection, a couple of preliminary points.... In that place where I was a teacher, upstate New York, a little town called Poughkeepsie, I remember it was Holy Week and the high school and college kids were out for the Easter break. I was standing at the ticket office in Poughkeepsie to get a ticket down to New York. And there were some Vassar girls standing behind me waiting for tickets, and they were talking very loudly and happily about all kinds of plans for the spring break, and guys, and the courses they were taking at Vassar. Two of them were. The third girl kept silent most of the time, but every so often, after a particular proposition was suggested by the other two girls, or a particular pronouncement was made by the other two girls, the third girl would say, "There ain't no way.... There ain't no way." And I thought that's not very good grammar for a Vassar girl. But then they sat behind me on the New York Central two-hour ride, and they continued the same animated dialogue. But the third girl, time after time, for two hours, would look out the window and sigh and observe, "There ain't no way." And, every time she said it, I agreed with her!

Now for the past couple of hundred years, particularly in Europe, starting with the eighteenth century, there have been some people who said, "Jesus crawled out of the cave? Jesus rose?.... There ain't no way!" Although up to that time, just about everybody believed in the physical resurrection of Jesus. But then there were theories that came along that said, "He didn't rise from the dead. This is what happened...This is what happened....This is what happened." OK. Just keep that in mind because I am going to talk about that for a minute.

At the same time that these things were happening, the biggest movie theatre in the world was showing the Reester show, Radio City Music Hall. And I am a movie addict. And Radio City Music Hall was, for me, the Vatican City of movies, the biggest stage, the most prestigious movies, and a huge theatrical presentation, live stage show. And every Easter for decades, the first part of the stage show was called "The Glory of Easter," and the second part was the Rockettes in bunny suits. But the first part, "The Glory of Easter," went this way. And I saw it, (At last I got to Radio City when I as a

sophomore in high school.) and I saw "The Glory of Easter" for the first time. The stage is completely dark, live action, the curtain goes up, and very slowly, the Rockettes, fully clothed in long white garments with big hats that looked like the letter V upside down and long white veils, one by one (These are very tall young women.) came out, all in white with long trains, carrying lilies, one by one, sideways, chanting, "A-a-a-aa-ah..." When the last lady got out, they turned and faced us, and slowly behind them, a simulated sun rose slowly and engulfed the stage in white light, as the Rockettes gazing at us through their lilies sang, "A-a-a-ah...." Now, even as a sophomore in high school, I thought, "There ain't no way that is the glory of Easter."

Teaching those bright kids for so many years, I found out that they wanted to know some things, for example, "Did He really rise?" The four gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, a young kid will say, "Wasn't it all kind of made up?" That's an honest young question.... "Wasn't it all kind of made up?...And all those guys were hanging out together anyhow." So, I want you to think of this. Now I am going to try to make this very short, like a cartoon. But I'm not distorting the truth. I'm just highly encapsulating the truth. But, over here, during this time when Christ was crucified and allegedly rose from the dead, that's taking place in Jerusalem. Over here, at the same time, there was a real human being, whose records we still have. He was not a follower of Jesus. He never met Jesus. He was a brilliant first-rate mind, Jewish intellectual, historian. He was so bright he was teaching what we call the "royal family." He taught aristocrats in Rome. He had left Jerusalem when he was quite young. He hadn't been back. His name was Josephus.... Josephus. And he wrote a book and he wrote letters, from Rome to the Pharisees here in Jerusalem and letters from the Pharisees in Jerusalem back to Rome. We have such letters. And they were written during the time of Jesus' life, his trial, and His resurrection. So Josephus is not only an objective witness whose writings we have. He is a rather highly intelligent hostile witness. He is not in the company line of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

OK. Now, there are dozens of theories; I boil them down to three. There ain't no way that carpenter crawled out of that cave! The first we will call the "Goon Theory," the second, the "Moon Theory," and the last, "The Swoon Theory." Now, those aren't the names the scholars gave them, but it helps me to remember.

First is the "Goon Theory." Jesus didn't rise from the dead. People don't get up from the grave, said this theory. So, what happened was the Pharisees hired some "goons," some thugs, who crept up to Jesus' tomb on Saturday night, stole the body, put it in a boat, rowed out to some nearby lake, and dumped the body in the lake. The reason that they did this was that Our Lord's enemies, whom we will give the stereotypical name of Pharisees, for shorthand, were scared because Jesus was loved by lots of people. They were scared that the Apostles would go running around town saying, "Those Pharisees killed that lovely, kind Jesus and we are turning His tomb into a shrine, and get your candles and your Jesus ashtrays and....." The Pharisees were terrified that the public

would turn against them because they killed this nice man whose corpse was in the tomb and the tomb was being turned into a shrine by the Apostles. And that would be just awful. So they stole the body.

Now, as theory after theory rose, another theory would come along and blow that theory away. That theory was blown away by the next theory because the next group of people said, "There ain't no way the Pharisees stole the body because if the Pharisees stole the body, once the Apostles ran around as they did and even Josephus mentions it.... ran around on Easter Sunday, saying "We have seen Him. He is risen. We're not scared anymore. We want to talk about Him. We've touched Him." the Pharisees would have said, "Cool it! Wait a minute. We took the body and we dumped it. And will you stop making this hullabaloo about 'He is risen. He is risen.' " Even Josephus writes, "Some of the Pharisees who were in on the killing of Jesus joined Jesus' group because they said they had seen him, as well, at which Josephus was pulling his hair out. Understandably!

OK. The next theory is the "Moon Theory." (Hang on. There are only three.) The next is the Moon. The Apostles stole the body. The Pharisees, that theory was thrown out. So, now the Apostles stole the body. And it's called the "Moon Theory" because they stole it under the moon on Saturday. They came and they slugged it out with the Roman guards, and they moved the rock. (By the way, the Greek word for the rock is a "boulder.") They moved the boulder and they grabbed Jesus and they put Him in a boat, and they dumped Him in a nearby lake. And the reason they did that is they were so embarrassed! "Here we follow this loser for three years. He says He's going to rise from the dead. He ain't rising. So we'll get rid of the body and then we'll say, "He's risen. And we are not embarrassed that we followed Him."

Now, the next theory that came along, said "Wait a minute. We got to dump the Moon Theory because..." (And even Freud said this in London when he was dying! Freud said, "How did these apostles who even according to Josephus' records were terrified, scared people when Jesus was arrested....How did their total personality change in three days, so they go out and preach with vigor? 'You can't scare us. We've touched Him. We are not even afraid to die.'" Josephus says when they were tortured and killed they went to their deaths, Josephus says in Latin, "libenter." Not just they but hundreds of others, including some of the Pharisees. "We saw Him. We touched Him." "Libenter" means serenely and joyfully... "You can kill us. There is another life." Where did they get all that guts and courage? And nobody can explain it. So that theory collapsed.

And then the last theory was "Swoon." That came out in the '60's. College kids were devouring the book. It was called "The Passover Plot." Cause the Moon Theory and the Goon Theory nobody believed, now we got the Swoon Theory: Our Lord didn't die. He conked out. I apologize for putting cartoon-y words but, for speed, He conked out and

they buried Him in the tomb, and on Sunday, He woke up, climbed out, moved the boulder, after being crucified for three hours and beaten with Roman whips, He moved the boulder, slugged it out with the Roman guards.... A cohort of Roman guards is from six to a dozen. But Jesus slugged it out, made His way about seven miles, stark naked, to Jerusalem, climbed the stairs where the Apostles were hiding out with double locks and doberman pinschers, and Our Lord walks in and says "Hi!" Then He dies. Then the Apostles pick up the body and dump it in the nearby lake which, by now, is getting very... crowded.

Well, you have the same problem with that as you did with everything else. How did the Apostles change Asia Minor and the Mediterranean World? How come they went to exile, torture and death? Even Freud said and modern psychologists say, "How come not one of them broke, not one of them?" They said, "It was a con. It was a scam." Don't talk to me! None of them broke, nor the couple hundred who said they saw Jesus, nor any of the Pharisees who said, "We saw Him." None of them broke. None of them weasled out.

I asked a professor of mine I like to drop names but not just to do that, but he's an Ivy League professor on the East Coast. He's a convert. He's read books like this one, cover to cover. He's read books such as I did in college, all the theories that "prove" Jesus didn't rise, when I thought I was losing my faith. By the way, I don't think I've pushed this book yet, "The Handbook of Christian Apologetics." The title would drive you under the pew, but don't be scared by the title. It's written by two converts, college professors, who have examined all the evidence. There is more about Jesus than there is about Napoleon and Lincoln, and Julius Caesar put together. And the chapter on the Resurrection is terrific. And I knew I had to get ahold of books like this. And this college professor who is a convert said a few years ago.... I said to him, "How come people don't believe the physical resurrection of Jesus?" And then he said, "Well if they believe that Christ rose from the dead, then He really was what He said He was, and He is worth listening to and He is worth hearing, and it means we will live forever and I will see my mom and you'll see a baby maybe who died as a baby... We will see them in the flesh, not some cosmic bubble blowing around in some kind of ganglion of clouds, IN THE FLESH! The night Jesus rises, remember, when He appears later, He says, "Got anything to eat?" And to Thomas, a week later, "Take your hands. Put it right there. I'm not a ghost." Jesus says it, "I'm not a ghost!" We shall rise.

If that's not true, let's go to breakfast, because nothing else makes sense. Carrying a cross doesn't make sense, and all the stuff He said is useless. I said to the professor, "How come people won't accept the physical resurrection?" The professor, who is a convert, who has read books like this by the dozens, said, "It seems... too good... to be true. It just seems too good to be true, that we will rise again with a risen body and meet all the people we have lost, and be with Christ and Joy forever... " It seems too good to be true. I can't wait for the risen body, hair back and everything! And that little silly

joke trivializes a magnificent mystery, that we shall see each other in the face.

In any event, if you are here again next Easter Sunday, and you are visiting or a member of the parish, and you find out who is saying the Mass and it is moi, and you say, "Well, I believe in the Risen Jesus. He's got to be alive and well to keep this Church together which He has all these years, and I don't have to be sitting through a lecture on all the reasons that they give that He didn't rise. I don't think I have to sit through that again...." There ain't no way!