**CHRIST IN OUR COMPANY**

Although the Easter Bunny and chocolate eggs tend to take over, Easter is a *Christian* celebration. It’s for those who believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ: his passing through death, by his voluntary sacrifice, to a new life with God.

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared only to his friends, to those who had been loyal to him, even though they had been devastated by his death and some had already lost hope.

Nowhere does it say that he showed himself to the Judean high priest or to the scribes, or to the Roman officials. He seems to have made no effort to prove to his enemies that he had risen from death. He didn’t intend to prove it to them by appearing alive before them. He would prove it in another way, through the witness of his closest friends.

He came to his friends on several occasions and implanted the Christian faith in them. They knew from living with him previously that he was a human being like themselves. Now he strengthened their faith in him not only as the Israelite Messiah but the Saviour of all, the risen Lord, God’s Son.

He had not merely come back to life like Lazarus whom he had restored to his sisters (Jn 11:1-44), or like the boy from Nain (Lk 7:11-17) whom he had handed back to his widowed mother. Both Lazarus and the boy eventually died, their bodies were buried and never seen again, although their remains could be located. Jesus showed, rather, that he had gone forward into a life with God, a form of human life that was totally new, unknown till then, an intensely spiritual life.

Even before his resurrection, when he was recognised as an ordinary man, he had shown remarkable spiritual power. He had brought some dead people back to life; he had restored some sick people to health; some derelicts and undesirables were restored to friendship not only with their fellows but also with God.

In the gospel according to John (Jn 20:19-31), Jesus sets up the means for continuing among all people his activity as risen Lord. There is the assembly of his friends on Sunday for the thanksgiving meal. We notice that he appeared to them on the evening of the first day of the week, and then eight days later, which by Israelite reckoning is exactly a week later, another Sunday.

We notice there, too, the beginnings of the sacraments of Holy Order and Reconciliation, when the risen Lord joined in the company of his friends. When Jesus gave his apostles the power to forgive sin, he was sharing his own total victory over every kind of evil and his unlimited power of healing, restoring, freeing and integrating people for life with God.

In the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:42-47), we glimpse the original Christian community, centred on the apostles, and the effect their way of life had on people around them.

We read: “These remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.” Clearly, the risen Lord was making his presence felt through his Apostles’ ministry and in the company of believing Christians.

They recognised him no longer as an earthly man like one of them but in the life of the Church, which extends his earthly life, and in the sacraments, which project his risen life.

“The many miracles and signs worked through the apostles made a deep impression on everyone.” The power to do miracles of healing was a sharing in the power of the risen Christ. It witnessed to a new type of humanity, victorious over evil in all its forms.

It wasn’t so much the miracles that indicated the presence of the risen Lord in the company of his friends, but rather the compelling witness to him that his followers gave in all walks of life.

After his resurrection, nothing can limit his powers for good. Nothing except the limitations of us through whom he chooses to act, especially the limits of our faith in him. We now have the privilege and the duty to continue the kind of activity that Jesus began in his earthly life: healing people, restoring them, freeing and integrating them, in order to lead them to God, and finally to unite them with God.

Our Christian community is no different from the community of the first believers. Christ is in our company in exactly the same ways. His resurrection is the central event of our lives. Our privilege is to show that he is active among us. Our task is to stamp his victory on every aspect of our lives.

Although the rhythm of secular life makes us feel that Sunday is the last day of the week, it is the first day of the Christian week. Here we are, like the first Christians, celebrating our Lord’s resurrection, aware of his presence among us. Let us offer ourselves willingly with his sacrifice and join wholeheartedly in his thanksgiving meal.