

# MUSINGS FROM THE EDITOR, TIMOTHY P. O'MALLEY

## DEAR READERS,

What does the resurrection sound like? I had this thought earlier in the spring, when faced with the daunting task of teaching an undergraduate theology class on the resurrection of Christ. Jesus' resurrection from the dead, as Joseph Ratzinger notes in his *Introduction to Christianity*, is not simply the continuation of his earthly life. Whatever happened to him in the resurrection produces stammering in those who witnessed it, a kind of dissonance reverberating throughout the Gospels. In each resurrection appearance, vision is granted "only when he [Jesus] opens men's eyes and makes their hearts open..." (*Introduction to Christianity*, 308).



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Our contemplation of the resurrected Christ, thus, requires a kind of purification of the imagination. The resurrection is not simply a matter of biology (the man physically dead, now physically lives) but the very transformation of history, of the cosmos. The entirety of our humanity, including the wounds of a life dedicated to self-giving love in a violent world, is taken up into the Triune life of God and bathed in resurrection light. Elsewhere, Ratzinger writes, "...resurrection [is] a pledge to the future of man and the cosmos, and in this sense a pledge to space, time and matter. History and cosmos are not realities alongside spirit, running on into a meaningless eternity or sinking down into an equally meaningless nothingness. In the resurrection, God proves himself to be the God also of the cosmos and history" (*Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 116).

How might the Christian teacher speak of such a transformation? If the evangelists themselves are reduced to stammering in their resurrection proclamation, what hope does the contemporary catechist have? Of course, this dilemma is not true of the doctrine of the resurrection alone. Can we persuade our students to perceive in creation not a rival account to scientific theories of the origin of the world, but the first act of a drama in which God tenderly draws us to himself? Can we move our students to recognize that the law of the Old Testament is not an imposition, but a sign of the Incarnation in which God's own will is expressed through the spoken, mutable word? Can we open the imaginations of our students beyond understanding Jesus as a "moral exemplar", seeing instead Jesus' life as the non-violent, non-forceful, non-coercive, and thus salvific union of humanity and divinity? In the present age, in which our religious imaginations have become increasingly impoverished, can our proclamation of the Word of God become once again a source of wonder and delight, rather than boredom and disdain?

Hence, the question that began these musings: what does the resurrection sound like? One of the more apt media for teaching the Resurrection is not the spoken word but music. The fourth movement of Mozart's Jupiter Symphony (41 K551) can, if listened to through the eyes of faith (or perhaps more aptly the ears of faith), form the imagination of the student to understand what is at stake in Christ's resurrection. The themes of the previous three movements reappear in this final movement, but in a novel way. What seems like the final note of the movement, opens up to an even more glorious crescendo. The darker sounds of the symphony are transfigured. And the listener learns precisely how beautiful creation can become. As one of my students aptly said, she herself was no longer listening to the music but the music was listening to her.

In the resurrection, the themes of a human life are taken up and played anew, by the divine composer of time and space. The Church, the orchestra of self-giving love, plays the symphony of the divine-human exchange for the entire world to hear. Each of the holy ones, those in heaven and on earth, becomes an instrument in this symphony of praise. Our lives, consisting of major and minor keys, are drawn into this ecclesial opus; until that day, when our whole selves (body and soul) will become an instrument of divine praise in the city of God. For, "nothing will be more delightful in that city than the song in glory of the grace of Christ, by whose blood we are made free" (Augustine, *De civitate dei*, 22.30; CCL 47B: 864.97-99). *This is what the resurrection sounds like!* And spending ten minutes listening to Mozart's symphony elicits the kind of wonder that may renew the Christian's own "image" of what occurs in the resurrection. The imagination is stretched, and we receive a glimpse (however momentary) of the resurrection itself.

We, catechists or teachers seeking to reawaken wonder in our students, will need to become mystagogues of

wonder. The Christian mystagogue is one who leads (*agogos*) the initiated into the mystery (*mysterion*) of God revealed in Christ. Each doctrine, each liturgical and spiritual practice of Christianity (when viewed contemplatively) reveals the depths of this love. Only through the wonder of contemplative sight can we begin to recognize how rich Christian teaching is. Defining this way of sight in philosophy and art, Christopher Dustin and Joanna Ziegler write:

Contemplative seeing is like 'studying' the stars: how they differ and yet remain the same in summer and on cold nights, or how they looked when you were four years old and wished upon them, or how, in later life, the heavens appear so much more vast and infinite though one still discerns an undeniable ordering of the cosmos. It is like studying the face of one who love, and how well you recognize that face, because of how often you have seen and really looked at it. Seeing that face has meant becoming familiar with its particularities, its unique curves, texture, and luminousness. The more minute the detail, it seems, the greater we cherish the whole person who frames it (*Practicing Mortality: Art, Philosophy, and Contemplative Seeing*, 14).

*So too in Christian teaching.* The more deeply we immerse ourselves into the particularities of the Christian narrative, allowing our imaginations to be filled with wonder, the more we come to know the face of God. Soon, our imaginations are evangelized, and we learn to experience life in Christ. Jean Mouroux notes regarding this transformation, "The Christian experience...interiorizes the truths of faith, awakens desire and aspiration, sustains and nourishes faithfulness; it enables us to see, touch, and taste God" (*The Christian Experience: An Introduction to Theology*, 369). As mystagogues of wonder, the catechist or Christian teacher seeks to interiorize the life of faith through the imagination, guiding students

to savor life in Christ. To see, to hear, to smell, to taste, and to touch, the resurrection itself. At least, as much as we can in the present age, “*for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face*” (1 Cor. 13:12).

This “mystagogical” approach to the formation of the Christian imagination is the theme of this issue of *Church Life*. Happily, we have excellent guides for this *re-formation* of our imaginations. In addition to our regular columnists (who reconfigure our imaginations each issue), John Cavadinitakes up where his previous article left off (“Evangelization, Catechesis, and the Mystery of Christ: The Catechetical Legacy of John Paul II”, *Church Life* 1.1), arguing that the teaching of doctrine seeds the imagination with “information” that comes to form the Christian over the course of a lifetime of entrance into the mystery. His article, “On Teaching Christianity” provides not only an important corrective against the opposition of information and formation in catechesis, but also a prescription for how to teach “information” as a formation into the divine grammar of love.

Colleen Moore, director of the Institute for Church Life’s Echo program, situates ministerial faith formation within the domain of the arts in her contribution, “The Dangerous Art of Becoming.” For Moore, art is not simply a component of a well-rounded ministerial formation program. Rather, ministerial formation itself is an art form in which the apprentice is invited “to situate their lives within the Christian mystery and to fashion their lives by this mystery through an ongoing relationship with the person of Christ and the Church” (39). The use of the arts in this formation cultivates the theological imagination of ministers, allowing them to become captured by the beautiful God.

Leonard DeLorenzo, director of Notre Dame Vision and a doctoral student in systematic theology at the University of Notre Dame, practices the

catechist in contemplative seeing through the art of film in his “The Space Between: Film and the Theological Imagination.” As DeLorenzo maintains, many films may actually do harm to the theological imagination, rather than allow such an imagination to flourish. On the other hand, if given the space to ruminate, the imagination may find films, such as *Good Will Hunting*, *Up in the Air*, and *Shrek*, fruitful fields for cultivating a theological vision. Through DeLorenzo’s “exegesis” of these three films, the catechist or teacher learns the art of using film to create a space for theological reflection.

Msgr. Michael Heintz, director of the M.Div. program at the University of Notre Dame and rector of St. Matthew’s Cathedral in South Bend, asks the reader to assess how we, reared in modernity, imagine Jesus Christ in his “Jesus: Sage or Sacrifice?” Msgr. Heintz tells the reader that it is “a perennial temptation to see in Jesus the instantiation of whatever ideals happen to be prized at any particular juncture in history, revealing much less about God and far more about our own predilections” (55). A healthy Christian imagination necessitates a “rule of faith” for contemplating Jesus, that of the sacrificial love of God. In a proper understanding of Christ, our imagination is purified of our own small way of imaging God as upholder of mores. Instead, we come to recognize that God is a communion of self-giving love, and in Jesus, we come face-to-face with the order of love himself.

David Fagerberg, senior advisor of the Notre Dame Center for Liturgy and associate professor in the Department of Theology at Notre Dame, provides one final exercise to cultivate the imagination of the reader for the art of evangelization. His “C.S. Lewis and the Theological Imagination” asks a single question: “Why are undergraduates so attracted by the fiction of Lewis?” His thesis is one that will help orient the array of parish or college reading

groups, which dip into the *Chronicle of Narnia* on a yearly basis. Fagerberg argues that Lewis is successful as an imaginative theologian, because his stories breathe the ethos of Christian doctrine, inviting the reader into a sacramental world in which we are taught to break out of the confines of a secular enchantment. What Lewis does in fiction, the Church should do in her preaching, teaching, and worship.

And dear reader, this renewal of the Church's preaching, teaching, and liturgy is the precise reason why our cultivation of a theological imagination is the first order of business for the new evangelization. The Christian imagination is not a fanciful, disconnection from reality. Imagination is our *bodily and spiritual* participation in the economy of salvation, in the self-emptying love of God. Closing with a passage from Hans urs von Balthasar's book on *Prayer*:

Love desires to have the beloved before its eyes. Thus the contemplative will employ the powers of the soul to summon up the image of the Beloved, the powers of his "inner senses" and his imagination to call forth the image of the incarnate Word. He will contemplate Jesus as he dwelt bodily on the earth, the things he said, the sound of his voice, the way he treated people, his appearance when at prayer, at the Last Supper, in his Passion. This picture is not meant to be a realistic photograph, but love's picture, solely concerned with love, the divine love of the Father, which is here manifested in the Son and in the concreteness of his whole earthly life. This is the only reason why, in prayer, we seek out the Lord's earthly form. We do not use it as a crutch for our weakness because we are not yet ready to soar into the realm of pure spirit: we do so in order to seek for the love of God, to see, hear and touch it in the humble form in which it offers itself to man. In prayer, our love seeks love, divine love, through the earthly image (with which it cannot dispense). So it is continually drawn on by the historical Jesus to the Christ who died, descended into hell, rose again and ascended into heaven, who has put his whole self eucharistically into the Church, and to whose return in glory we look forward. He alone is the whole, living Christ over whom death has no power; he is the "Christ of faith" who gives and reveals himself to the believer who loves and prays, enabling him to share in his transfigured, eternal life (Rom 6; 2 Cor 5:15f). This is he whom love seeks to embrace in his earthly form (*Prayer*, 129-30).