



LOURDES LEAFLET

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MARY, CAUSE OF OUR JOY

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I'm transported back to a time full of cafeteria food and camp songs. It's a rowdy group of kids, led by a song leader, singing about joy down in their hearts. The air's full of summertime: a week of swimming, crafts, canoeing, exploring, singing.

I grew up the daughter of a camp manager. For me, camp wasn't a week-long event, but an entire summer of adventure. I did spend a week away from home during most summers—one of the Dad's benefits—but there was excitement packed into the daily routine of behind-the-scenes life. There were

frogs in the pool and dogs in the cabins. There were emergency phone calls to make and supplies to refill. There was a shortage of counselors and an open thirty minutes to fill with song.

The word joy brings the smell of the swamp to my nose, reminds me of the summer bugs and prompts me to humming an assortment of catchy group tunes. In that word is my childhood.

There were parts of my young life filled with pain, of course, but when I think back to it, it's the joy of camp life and life in the country that comes to mind first. I remember the many cats we always seemed to have, the fallen tree that became my hidden refuge, the maze of dikes that never failed to provide an escape.

In my young adult years, I don't think I ever considered joy. Joy was for kids. I was after happiness; wasn't joy just another word for happiness?

I'm a few years removed from those tumultuous years, and when I think of joy now, I immediately think of my three young children and the joy they experience and that they bring to our lives.

But joy isn't just for kids.

Or maybe it is. Maybe it's for the kid deep within each of us. Maybe it's for the child curled up, protecting herself from the pain of the world. Maybe it's for the cynical teenager whose voice has never really gone away from our mental dialogue.

When I see Mary's statue, pristine and immovable at the front of our church, I immediately notice how different we are. What does she know of my life? She could be light years away from me. Her joy seems different than mine, less earthy and applicable to my messy life.

Yet we honor her as Cause of Our Joy precisely because she isn't distant or remote. She's right here, beside us.

The title Cause of Our Joy began in antiquity. Perhaps it is one of the oldest of Mary's titles. Its purpose, then as now, is to remind us all of her role in each of our lives as a result of her Yes.

She said Yes to God and by doing that, she said Yes for each of us. She brought us the Savior in an intimate way, through her womb. She opened the door to her heart, trusted in God, and gave us all the most beautiful gift.

In saying Yes to God, Mary allowed salvation to take place. By agreeing to motherhood, she caused the joy I feel at the Christmas midnight Mass; without Mary's Yes, there would be no Christmas.

She didn't cause Jesus' birth by herself, but her cooperation, her Yes, makes her a partner. Joy is Jesus; Jesus is joy.

When I find myself eye-to-eye with Mary, I see that joy is something all around me, waiting for me to see it. It's in that steaming cup of coffee, savored during morning prayers in the silence of my kitchen. It's in the bite in the air as the seasons change. It's in the fall sunsets, glimpsed while my hands are immersed in soapy water.

There is joy all around me, from the small hands to the wagging tails. It's in the coziness of a hot wood stove, the accomplishment of finishing a house project, the lovely interlude of music.

Most of all, it's in the peace I find every week when I celebrate the Eucharist, when I participate in Mass, when I offer myself again to my Lord.

Did Mary pause to marvel at the table each night, surrounded by expectant faces and filled with food? What was it like, raising Jesus as an ordinary boy while knowing He was so much more?

Maybe, instead of limiting Mary to the statue in front of the church, I should picture her stained with the day's work, lovely despite her disheveled hair, beaming though exhausted from laundering and lifting and cooking. Toddler Jesus was surely as much a handful as any other toddler, yet they have those moments of beauty and joy-giving. I imagine her one minute holding on to every ounce of patience with Jesus, who must have said "I do it MYSELF!" at least once, and then, in the next moment, feeling his soft hair under her lips as he exclaimed "Hug you!" for no reason other than affection.

When she said Yes to Gabriel at the Annunciation, Mary couldn't have known the joy she would bring to each of us. As the first person to know the person of Jesus — inside her very self — she's the starting point for the Messiah. She wasn't the author or the creator, but she was the vessel. She didn't work alone to bring Jesus into the world, but she did cooperate and agree to the terms.

Her Yes resounds to my daily life. It reaches me, two thousand years later, sitting in front of a glowing screen and ignoring the suspicious thunks a toddler's causing in the other room. Her joy overflows to touch me, despite my hesitation and doubt.

She holds out her hand, once again, asking me to come with her to see something. I know her look; I've used it with my children. There's a great surprise waiting for me, and when I go with her, I see that joy is a person and that she is the one who led me to Him..

HAIL MARY

In dangers, in doubts, in difficulties, think of Mary, call upon Mary. Let not her name depart from your lips, never suffer it to leave your heart. And that you may obtain the assistance of her prayer, neglect not to walk in her footsteps. With her for guide, you shall never go astray; while invoking her, you shall never lose heart; so long as she is in your mind, you are safe from deception; while she holds your hand, you cannot fall; under her protection you have nothing to fear; if she walks before you, you shall not grow weary; if she shows you favor, you shall reach the goal.

Lunatics, Liars, or Witnesses to the Risen Lord?

We know *who* the disciples saw after the empty tomb was found.

But *what* did they see?

As Christians we believe that the same person who had died on the cross, Jesus Christ, really appeared in the flesh-and-blood, even with the same body as before, yet in a *glorified* condition.

But last year, the Boston Globe published an interview with a secular theologian (yes, you read that right), Bart Ehrman who offered a 'new theory' about what the disciples had seen.

His answer: a hallucination. The disciples were so distraught by the death of their savior, so his theory goes, that their minds conjured up visions of Him. It was on the basis of these visions that Christianity supposedly took off as a global faith. Not surprisingly, much of this theory relies not on theology or history, but modern psychology.

This is actually a modern version of a very 'old' theory, one that goes back to the earliest centuries of the Church, when it was known as the heresy of Docetism: the false teaching that Christ only seemed to have a body but that there was no actual Incarnation.

And, it is completely at odds with Scripture. Ehrman, for all the stock he puts in modern psychology, has overlooked a glaring fact: the gospel writers knew the difference between such things as hallucinations, ghosts, and what is real. They would have, first of all, been familiar with the story from 1 Samuel 28, where the beleaguered King Saul hires a medium to conjure up the ghost of Samuel.

The gospel writers may not have been schooled in the categories of modern psychology, but they certainly were familiar with prophetic visions as well. Just flip open the Old Testament and move your finger around the second half and you're likely to land in one of the prophetic books.

Let's assume we've done just that and found ourselves in Ezekiel, which contains some of the most fantastic visions in all literature. The prophet opens his book by declaring in the first verse that "the heavens opened, and I saw divine visions." The first vision was of a glowing cloud with polished metal in its middle and out of which came four four-winged and four-faced creatures. As Christians we can believe that Ezekiel had some kind of vision, but it was a vision into heaven: nowhere do we read that one of those creatures steps into the earthly world of Ezekiel.

Somewhat later in the book, Ezekiel has quite a different vision in which he prophesies over a valley full of dried bones. Those bones start coming to life in front of him: bones start connecting with bone and flesh and muscle start growing.

As Christians we believe this vision was inspired by God. But that's not the same thing as believing that there was a historical event in which an ancient Jewish prophet walked out into a valley of bones and brought them back to life. No one, as far as this writer is aware, claims that there was some inexplicable mass resurrection miracle that occurred during the time of Ezekiel. (Again, this does *nothing* to diminish belief that Ezekiel had an authentic vision from God. But it was just that: a *vision*.)

The point is that the disciples were certainly aware of the possibility of visions and apparitions.

This brings us back to Ehrman. He does have one great insight in that Boston Globe interview: had there simply been an empty tomb and nothing else, the disciples would have made the assumption that any other normal person would make when finding an empty grave—someone must have snatched the body. Ehrman concludes that it was the appearances of Jesus after His death that became the foundation for their new faith. Now, where he goes off the rails is in his claim that these appearances were nothing more than hallucinations.

Here's the problem with Ehrman's thesis: the same logic that applies to the empty tomb also would hold true for the resurrection appearances of Jesus. The disciples had ample categories of experience available to them to explain this phenomenon in terms understandable to them. They could have concluded that they were seeing some ghost, as Saul saw Samuel. Or they could have chalked their experiences up to a prophetic vision, along the lines of an Ezekiel. That's how any normal person would have reacted to the visions. Just like any normal person would not assume an empty grave meant a corpse had risen from the dead.

But something convinced them that they had encountered something entirely new and never before seen in the history of the world—that all their previous categories of experience were inadequate to explain what they were seeing.

Prior to the gospel accounts of the resurrection, there are clues in experiences the disciples had, experiences the significance of which they may not have grasped until after the resurrection of Jesus. One is Jesus walking on the water. In the versions of this story that appear in Mark 6 and Matthew 14, the disciples actually think they are seeing a *ghost*. That is the word actually used in the New American Bible. In the older Douay-Rheims translation, the original Greek is translated as *apparition*. In the Greek

itself, the word *isphantasma*, an obvious precursor to our English word *phantasm*.

Whichever word is best, one thing is certain: the disciples did not really think they were seeing Jesus Christ in the flesh-and-blood.

What convinced them otherwise?

The Gospel of Matthew, which has a longer version of this than Mark, offers some insight. First, that seeming ghost speaks to them: "Take courage, it is I. Do not be afraid." Then a conversation ensues between Jesus and Peter. Well, people hear voices all the time. But then something happens to Peter—something much more real and objective than hearing a voice and seeing a ghost-like image. Peter himself is able to walk on the water, after expressing faith in Jesus.

If any of the disciplines remained unconvinced that this was really Jesus, what happened next must have clinched it: once Peter's faith begins to falter, he sinks and cries out to Jesus, who stretches out his hand and catches Peter. Now there are people who claim to have heard and seen ghosts, but how many say that a ghost reached out and physically grabbed them?

Another episode that prepared the way for the resurrection was the transfiguration. Here's how it's described in Matthew 17: "And he was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light." Note there is no underlying cause for the disciples to be hallucinating at this point. Christ has not yet died so the naturalistic explanation that Ehrman uses to explain the resurrection appearances—that their grief-stricken minds were playing tricks on them—does not work here.

Now what exactly were the disciples witnessing? According to Aquinas, it was the glory of Christ's deity and of His soul shining through the body. He even seems to suggest that this sudden burst of glory might appear to an observer to be similar to what Christ might have looked like in His glorified body. (The difference is that this was temporary and was miraculous because Christ's body at this point had not been glorified.)

In the gospel accounts, the transfiguration sticks out. More to the point, it seems out of place. It doesn't really fit in with other miracles performed by Jesus, nor is it connected to any parable, sermon, or other teaching. Notably, in the Gospel of Matthew, it occurs soon after Peter's confession of Christ's identity. But the significance of that confession, and of the transfiguration itself, cannot be fully grasped until after the resurrection. (This explains why Christ tells the three disciples to disclose to no one what they had seen until after He had been "raised from the dead.")

These pre-resurrection experiences led the disciples to be open to the possibility that Jesus Christ had really risen from the dead—that they were dealing with a new reality, something for which previous categories of experience could not account. Of course, the resurrection narratives themselves contain plenty of indicators that the disciples realized the resurrected Christ was really with them in the flesh and blood.

Accounts of shared meals and the encounter on the road to Emmaus come immediately to mind. But the most compelling story that demonstrates the reality of the resurrection may be that of Doubting Thomas.

Thomas, perhaps channeling his inner psychologist, did not believe what he was seeing. He must have considered it some sort of vision that fell short of the real thing. It was only by putting his fingers into the nail holes and his hand into the wounded side of Jesus that Thomas came to faith. Here was something wholly new in history: both Saul and Ezekiel had authentic visions, but Saul never shook hands with the ghost of Samuel nor did Ezekiel get to pet one of the living creatures.

C.S. Lewis, the great twentieth century apologist, once said the gospel accounts force one to accept Jesus Christ as either Lord, lunatic, or liar (as quoted by Ehrman, actually). Lewis' point was that there is no way of compromising with the story of Jesus. For those who cannot accept the possibility of miracles or of an Incarnation, the Gospels do not permit the easy out of saying Jesus was merely a moralist, a prophet, wise teacher, or social revolutionary.

We face a similar choice with the apostles and the gospel writers. They were either lunatics, liars, or they actually witnessed the risen Lord.

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