

Learn Your Faith...A Weekly Educational Column.

The central mystery of the Christian faith is, without doubt, the Resurrection of Our Lord

Either Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and is who He says he is, or He did not rise from the dead, and the Christian faith is based on a falsehood. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is either a truth or a falsehood. It cannot be both. As St. Paul writes to the Christian community in Corinth, Greece in about the year 56 A.D., “if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is void of content, and your faith is empty, too” (1Cor 15:14).

With this in mind, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us, “[T]he Resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; handed on as fundamental by Tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the Paschal [Easter] mystery along with the Cross....”

If we consider that a “mystery” may be defined as “something for which we do not have an explanation”, and not “something for which there is no explanation”, we can accept the fact that Christ rose from the dead even though we cannot completely explain it.

If Jesus Christ did not really rise from the dead, other explanations may account for the establishment of the Christian Church. For example, the apostles and the “women at the tomb” were suffering from mass hallucination or hysteria. Or perhaps the apostles set out to create an elaborate conspiracy to deceive the local Jewish authorities, but to their surprise, ended by deceiving a rather large part of the world. Maybe Jesus did not really die, but fell into some sort of swoon, escaped from the hands of his enemies, and disappeared into hiding. He and His followers masterminded the creation of a myth, and a cult of worship which portray Him as God who had come into the world as a man.

All of these theories are possible, but unlikely. What did the followers of Jesus have to gain? If Jesus did not rise from the dead, but His followers created the “Jesus myth” for their own ends, history shows us that they gained only one thing for their elaborate efforts: persecution, suffering, and death.

“It is at this point that awe and trembling fall upon us as we read the records. If the story is false, it is at least a much stranger story than we expected, something for which “philosophical” religion, psychical research, and popular superstition have all alike failed to prepare us. If the story is true, then a whole new mode of being has arisen in the universe”.

(C.S. Lewis, *Miracles*, Chapter 16).

(Sources: CCC 638-644. Kreeft and Tacelli: *Handbook of Christian Apologetics*, pp. 178-198).