



AND Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.*¹⁹ *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*²⁰ *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* AMEN (Matthew 28:18-20)

We observe the Real, Spiritual Presence of the Lord at each observance of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion. The family of God feeds on the Lord's Supper together just as close families of the world have always eaten their evening suppers together. It is right and proper that the Presence of our Lord be observed in that meal as well as with all of the other members who have been blessed to have been adopted into that royal family.

We may have little trouble understanding that spiritual Presence of the Lord during the Communion Service, but do we recognize His Presence with us in all other sundry times and occasions? If we do realize His Presence with the believer, how do we view that Presence? Is the Lord not with His people in every circumstance, and is His power in our lives not manifested in many wonderful ways?

The many roads to Emmaus that the Christian travels are fraught with stones and dangers; but does not the Lord travel those roads right beside us every step of the way – even if we do not recognize His merciful hand and sympathizing demeanor. Our recognition of Him may well be delayed until the breaking of bread before us that we remember His promises fully. Of course, that is yet another one of the purposes of observing Holy Communion.

You may recall our two brothers on that distant Road to Emmaus who conversed along the way with the risen Savior and knew it not until the breaking of bread: *And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight.* (Luke 24:28-31) This is only one episode of the misidentification of the Lord in His real Presence.

I invite your attention to the boy of twelve years age left alone in Jerusalem following the Passover. It was this occasion the parents believed the Lord to be present with them when He was not but was, instead, back in Jerusalem dialoguing with the chief priests and doctors in the Temple. If we have been negligent of our duties and responsibilities as members of the Christian family, we may erroneously believe the Lord is with us in our clumsy forgetfulness, but He may not be. He may be performing the very duties elsewhere that we have neglected. The way to renew His presence with us is to be about, as He is, our Father's business.

Remember the precious lady who so loved the Lord as to share His sufferings beneath His cross at Calvary? The same who waited at the cross until His body was taken down? The one who remained at the Garden Tomb until the stone boulder was sealed by the Roman Pontiff's seal? The one who came early, while it was yet dark, on the first day of the week to prepare His body more properly with oils and ointments? It was Mary Magdalene, one of the most amazing women in the Bible. She loved the Lord with an enduring love that surpassed the presumed life of the object of her affections – the Lord Jesus Christ! She came to properly treat the dead body of her Lord. She was heartbroken to find the Tomb empty when she should have rejoiced at the sight. She believed that someone – perhaps the Gardener - had removed the body of her Lord. As she took a lingering look into the open Tomb, weeping profusely, she saw two angels who asked, *Woman, why weepest thou?* Of course they KNEW. But the question was asked to drive the glory of the moment home to Mary's hurting soul. The two angels were looking toward Mary and beyond. They could see the figure approaching her from the other direction. What a precious and sweet moment. She turned to see the figure whom she mistook to be the gardener – even though He was truly the Gardener of Souls. Her eyes brimming with tears, Mary could not recognize the form approaching. The presumed gardener repeated the same question the angels had asked, *Woman, why weepest thou?* And followed on with another question the answer to which He was fully aware: *whom seekest thou?* Sweet Mary responded, *Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.* I love Mary! I love Mary because Mary loved the Lord – even if she believed Him dead! And I love Mary, too, because the Lord loves Mary! Mary came to honor a dead body little realizing that she would find the LIVING body of her Lord!

Jesus saith unto her, Mary. No one ever called out the name of Lazarus of Bethany as did Jesus; and no one ever called out Mary's name as did her Lord. The compassion and love conveyed through that voice echoes throughout the annals of eternity! *She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master.*

How often do we consider the nailing to the cross to be the end of the story of our Lord. In some churches, it is even taught to be the last. But it was not the last, and thank God Almighty for that. There comes a resurrection following the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. Mary was there to be the first to behold the risen Savior, and she was the first to bear the fullness of the Gospel to the other disciples and apostles. What an honor for Mary, and she wasted no time in doing so – neither should we.

We learn from Mary we may mistake the presence of the Lord for some random Good Samaritan – of course, He is! Or some compassionate man or woman in line at the grocers who pays the bill a poor widow is unable to pay for groceries. Of course, that is Christ working through that vessel of His to perform the good. But do we recognize that presence working in others. In Islamic countries, few care about the fate of widows and orphans except to use and exploit them to the fullest. But I know a Christian husband and wife team who run a mission in such a country where they train widows and abandoned women to sew and to do other kinds of work to make a living. The same couple take in orphaned children who are mentally challenged and who would lie, as did the beggar Lazarus, before the gates of the wealthy begging crumbs were it not for the

labors of this couple. Do we recognize that the good works of such saints is not due to their own goodness, but that of the Lord working in and through them?

When Christ approaches near to us when we are distraught over matters too sorrowful to cope with, we should make no suppositions for we KNOW it is He who is always there to take our uplifted hand and pull us from the briny foam.

I will relate a story coming out of Egypt about ten years back of a man who murdered his wife (a rather small crime in Arab countries). He buried his wife, but he also buried alive their small daughter in the same grave. The irony of the story begins. Searchers located the grave FOUR days later and exhumed the body of his wife and daughter. After four days of burial, the daughter was miraculously still alive and returned to good health. When asked how she survived that long period covered in the grave, she told the inquirers that there was a kind Man who stayed with her and talked to her so that she was not afraid or lonely. It is amazing even the Muslim news broadcasters admitted that no one else but Jesus could have been that Man since that is exactly the kind of things He was prone to do.

Friends, will we have to be buried alive to be prompted to share our testimony of newness of life in Christ Jesus?