

Easter Sunday

Have you ever had refrigerator blindness? You know, when you're making a sandwich, you want some mayonnaise, you open the door of the fridge, you can't find it, so you complain to anyone within earshot, "There's no mayo." Then, another person in the house walks over, looks inside, spots the jar in plain view, plucks it off the shelf, and calmly hands it to you. Some people say men have this "medical condition" more than women do, and even the gospel of Easter Sunday bears this out. The women can tell there really is no mayo in the door of the fridge.

On the first Easter Sunday morning, skeptics offered faltering explanations for the empty tomb. Some argued from refrigerator blindness: the women went there, looked inside, and didn't see the body, even though it was right there. Or they figured, other disciples stole the body before the women got there. Or the women went to the wrong tomb. Or Jesus didn't really die; the crucifixion only stunned him, and after a few hours' rest in the dark of night, he got up again and walked out of the tomb.

The last chapter of Matthew's gospel knocks off these explanations one by one. The tomb was empty—even the skeptics agreed to that. The women found the stone rolled back, and an angel sitting on it, as if to boast, "Look what I did." When Matthew told the story of Jesus' birth at the beginning of his gospel, an angel explained everything to Joseph. When Matthew told the story of Jesus' resurrection at the end of his gospel, an angel explained everything to the women. Then, fearful yet overjoyed, they started on their way toward Galilee when they saw Jesus, not inside the fridge where he was supposed to be. These women were the first witnesses. According to the New Testament, there were hundreds more. To the skeptics, these two points become inescapable: Witnesses saw the empty tomb; witnesses saw the risen Jesus. Our faith relies on that testimony.

Some people still look at this evidence with refrigerator blindness. The testimony is right there, but they just can't see it. Often they need someone else to open the door and hand them the mayo. Jesus asked his disciples to open the door to others, and that is what he asks of us.

We make better witnesses once we acknowledge how the risen Christ comes to us. Sometimes we don't get it: We have been deaf to the angel he sent to guide us. We have misjudged the good intentions of a neighbor. We have been blind to his presence around us every day. OK, we have not seen him risen as did the women who embraced his feet. But we heard his voice from an insightful teacher, we touched his wounds when we cared for a sick child, we tasted his goodness in a lover's kiss, and we saw him in the poverty of a stranger on the street. Once it happens, once you've seen what was right in front of you all along, you'll hear the words Matthew cited at the end of today's gospel, giving you all you need to tell others what you believe: "Do not be afraid. Tell people. They will see me."