

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In this Easter season we are having a lesson in apologetics--how to defend our faith. The cornerstone of apologetics is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

After we dismiss those who say the resurrection was a made up fairy tale to teach that Jesus' loving spirit was still alive in the world, we have two categories of people who deny the fact of the resurrection: those who say He never died in the first place, and those who say He died, but something else happened to His body.

Both groups of people come up with a whole range of different theories to try to explain away the fact of the resurrection. Let's take those who say Jesus didn't really die first.

Some say Jesus didn't really die. Someone else died instead. Maybe it was a clever lookalike that His disciples substituted. Others say it was really Judas and Jesus survived. Still others argue that it was really Jesus' kinsman, James, who died on the cross. There is no evidence of any kind that this could possibly be true. In fact, these are all theories made up to try to explain the fact of the resurrection.

To believe this, we have to believe that the Jewish and Roman authorities got the wrong man, put him on trial publicly and executed him publicly. Are we to believe that the Jews would make such a mistake? They were intent on Jesus' death, and they were so determined that they trooped Jesus in to see Pilate and Herod, and then asked for soldiers to guard his tomb. So, they would have gone to all this trouble, but made the mistake of executing the wrong fellow? I don't think so.

Furthermore, wouldn't the condemned man have protested that they had the wrong person? There is no record of this. The condemned man didn't say "I'm a patsy!" He suffered in silence and answered Pilate's questions with sad dignity that fits perfectly with the personality of the Jesus we know through the gospels.

Finally, we know it was Jesus who died because of the witnesses at the crucifixion. Would John the Apostle have been heartbroken if he knew an impostor was on the cross? Would Peter have been wracked with guilt if he knew he hadn't really betrayed his Master? Would the Blessed Mother have been tortured with grief at the death of her son if she knew it was really someone else? Were they all pretending?

Would they have ended up giving up everything and being tortured and killed, still perpetrating the hoax?

No. It really was Jesus of Nazareth who died on the cross that day--not somebody else.

Your Pastor,
Fr. Longenecker