

## Trinity XI

*that which I also received . . .* (I Corinthians XV).

St. Paul is already a traditionalist! This letter was written about AD50, barely twenty years after the Resurrection, when many witnesses were still alive - and when St. Paul's adult life covers the whole period anyway. And this letter is one of the best attested - it is quoted explicitly by Clement of Rome, the earliest of the Church Fathers, so the text had already been disseminated not long after St. Paul's death.

The list of witnesses is remarkably different from what is in the gospels. The obvious point is that there are (probably) no women here. I do not think that is because St. Paul is sexist. He is quoting a list already formed, not making one up himself. Nor is it because Greeks were even more sexist than Jews, though most Greek legal systems gave very little weight to a woman's testimony (as is still the case in Islam), so it is just possible that missionaries found it futile to use stories of the Lord appearing to women. No, I think this list is serving a *different purpose* from the Gospel stories.

There are no witnesses of the *process* of the resurrection, only of the *consequences*. The Gospel writers have the sense to express this truth, and are forced (partly by facts, partly by the nature of their books) to focus on the *immediate* consequences. It was the Lord's doing to reveal himself first to women, just as he had given women respect in his earthly ministry.

But this list is about the *longer term*, and not about the moments immediately after the resurrection. We are not dealing so much with the initial recognition of the fact as with the declaration of the consequences.

The resurrection of the Lord is not a low-key dispute as to whether somebody is dead or alive (and even if alive would sooner or later die, just as we all will). One major point about the resurrection is that it conclusively gives the Lord that authority he had already assumed before the crucifixion. This list of appearances should be read in the light of Matthew 28.18 "*All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth.*"

The second truth is that the risen life of the Lord is a shared experience of the faithful. Matthew continues (20) "*. . . and lo I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.*" To this the appropriate (though not universal) response is "*worship*", for (to put it no stronger) the appearance of the Lord can be no less than his Father validating all that had gone before.

Both in Matthew and in the list there is a movement from the Lord's authority to the authority of the apostles for mission. For an "apostle" means a "sent man" - a person exercising the authority given to him by his principal. In Matthew, we read (19) "Go ye therefore and make disciples"; in St. Paul, the list leads into an account of his own mission.

But, Matthew says, "some doubted". God's authority can be rejected. St. Paul had doubted. More than that, he knew the alternative explanations; he had tried to make them work, had even persecuted, and had been defeated.

The Lord can reveal himself to us as he wills, and not as we would choose. That is part of his authority, and we must not ask for his weakness. The particular form of the resurrection appearances is, we presume, no longer to be expected. (We could be wrong.) The presence of the Lord with us remains - but if so, also his authority and, as he appoints, our own position as apostles. We are the sent men (nobody suggests all the five hundred brethren were in our modern sense clergy, and the Greek would in fact allow of them being both male and female). We are called to worship, certainly, and not least in this sacrament. But the resurrection puts us both under authority, and also with authority, and so with a duty to "make disciples". Much has been given to us; much will also be required of us.