***Why I Do Not Believe That Jesus Simply Rose from The Dead***

I want to be VERY clear. I believe with every fiber of my being that Jesus really died on the Cross, was really placed in the tomb and on the third day really came out of the tomb alive.

 I believe that because I believe the Biblical accounts, because I am a Conciliar Christian, believing what the Ecumenical Councils teach, I believe what is contained in the Creeds and have encountered the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ in Word, in Sacrament and experientially. If a Bishop does not believe in the literal Resurrection of Jesus, then he separates himself from the Faith. In fact, a Bishop is required to proclaim the Resurrection, and the two lappets that hang from the back of his mitre are Bible markers, demonstrating that as a successor to the Apostles the Bishop must proclaim, propagate and defend all that is in the Holy Scriptures. In most traditions at each ordination: deacon, priest, and bishop the candidate must publicly profess that he believes that all things necessary for salvation are contained in the Old and New Testaments. Even the way that a bishop blesses people (different from a priest) demonstrates his belief in the two natures of Christ and the Holy Trinity. (The first two fingers on top and the third and fourth fingers joined with the thumb.). If what I have just said is the case am I asserting that Jesus didn’t simply rise from the dead?

 As a precursor to this, I ask you to go back to Nazareth and go to the Carpenter Shop of St. Joseph. What do you imagine and what do you see when you think “carpenter?” Do you remember when the Temple was built in Jerusalem? Tall Cedars were floated from Lebanon for the substantial elements of building. The most common woods of Olive and Palms in the Holy Land were not sufficient. Moreover, the Greek word for “carpenter” found in the Bible does not translate “woodworker.” Now back to Nazareth: look inside the shop and you will see the tools of a stone mason. English and other modern languages are sometimes problematic when we attempt to reconstruct Bible stories. Another example: Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger. Let’s go to Bethlehem, where we can still see the caves, and two types of stone troughs: one that is usually rectangular for the water and one that is usually round for the grain. Maybe our problem at times is that we sometimes allow our contemporary images that are reinforced by movies to lead us away from what the Biblical languages tell us. In my last example, it is not that Jesus was not born in a stable, but He was not born into the type of stable that we construct today out of pine wood. Ironic: born in a cave and then thirty-three years later laid into a cave.

 And now we must go to the Tomb near Calvary. Due to additional Biblical explanation in both the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and in the Fourth Gospel of John, we read carefully that Jesus was laid in a tomb. We are told that a large stone was placed in front of the opening, and we read with excitement that the stone was rolled away and that Jesus had Risen from the Dead. This is not only correct, but it is a critical yet basic accounting. Let’s ask a few questions. What were tombs like in those days? What type of stone would have been placed there? Was this a one-person job? The explanation of Jesus being placed in the Tomb (of Joseph of Arimathea) would have involved several people. Moreover, if we were to enter a Tomb in Jerusalem, even as we can still do - both outside of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre - we would see several rooms where mourners could gather, where the anointing of the body could take place, where the shroud could be placed over the body. On one hand, anyone hearing of the Resurrection of Jesus, over two thousand years ago would know exactly what a tomb was like. No additional information needed to be added. We usually see a hole in a mountainside and a big round boulder. That’s simply not what would been there according to most Biblical archeologists, and in some instances in the Holy Land there are occasional reconstructions done for pilgrims to match what they want to see so as not to disappoint them. Tombs varied from place to place and also varied depending upon socio-economic realities. Was Joseph of Arimathea a wealthy man? Maybe, maybe not. Was he well known? Given Biblical references, it would appear so. The problem is that while most Biblical Archeologists are rather convinced about where the Tomb of Joseph of Arimathea and thus, Jesus, was the dilemma is that if you were to go into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and go to the site of where believe the Tomb would be…….it doesn’t look like a tomb. I had been destroyed so many times that what is built now allows the worshiper to enter into the small space and kneel, pray and touch. There are numerous tombs in other parts of this remarkable church and one can even descend numerous steps to discover many other remarkable “finds” such as where many believe St. Helena found the True Cross. BUT we must investigate first century tombs, read carefully the Greek words explaining all that transpired from Good Friday through Easter, and examine carefully Biblical archeology in order to recreate what must have been.

 Briefly, in all probability Jesus was placed in an upper middle class, lower upper-class tomb that had at least two rooms: the antechamber and the tomb. There would have been at least one slab and maybe two. If you enter the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, you will see a Crusader age “Anointing Stone” as you walk from the highest point of the interior - Calvary - to the lower level - site of the tomb. As you make this walk you must pass the “slab” - “Anointing stone.” People knew of the customs of the Jews and the Gospels explain the necessity of anointing the Body of Jesus. That reality is when the Empty Tomb was discovered by the Holy Women. Now let’s look at the Stone. There is absolutely no credible scholarship that mentions a large round boulder being used at tombs. Some archeology shows us some very large somewhat square Stones that were used like a cork in a bottle. BUT what we discover is that just in front of the opening to many tombs is a carved out “track” that on the left and right is ground level but in round fashion dips with the lowest point being in the middle of the groove. A very large round wheel like stone would be rolled into the track and would suddenly drop into the groove. Obviously, this was also not a one-man job! Now visualize this. Can you see how much more difficult it would have been to move that stone as opposed to simply getting a crew to roll a round boulder?

 Now let us turn to the Shroud. There will be those who do not believe in the Shroud of Turin. One does not need to believe in its authenticity in order to believe in the Resurrection! But the Shroud is a negative image of a man — it is not a “positive image” like a picture. To move rapidly ahead, what is evident is that what is present was caused by an extraordinary surge of energy - as one scientist says, “a supernatural flash of light.” Have you ever wondered about the Holy Fire at the Great Vigil — the Paschal Candle, “The Light of Christ.”

 Therefore, I simply cannot use English, passive words when I proclaim my belief in the Resurrection. I am compelled to use active words! I can rise from my bed every day. Jesus didn’t rise from a deep sleep. He was not resuscitated. HE BURST FORTH FROM THE TOMB!

 His Resurrection — even for those who mistrust everything other than what they read in their favorite English translation of the Bible - was a supernatural, dynamic action of bursting forth from death into life. Simply looking carefully at all that one can see today in Jerusalem, following the skeptical minds of Biblical archeologists, and reviewing the words in the Biblical languages makes it clear that saying “Jesus rose from the dead” is a massive understatement. He burst forth from the most impossible “shackles” and He did it for you and me. And that is why I do not believe that He SIMPLY Rose from the dead.