

At The Cross

In *Ordinary Time*, novelist A. J. Mojtabai describes the reaction of a vagrant who fetches up in a Texas rescue mission and encounters a mural of the crucifixion. "He's never seen a Jesus this blond or this comfortable; he might be just lounging on the cross and saying, 'No sweat, no hassle.'"

We tell a lie if that's how we paint the Easter Jesus.

Oh, he strode out of the tomb, all right, "with a mighty triumph o'er his foes," as Robert Lowry's immortal hymn phrases it. Battle-hardened legionnaires wet their togas and wished for a foxhole. A blazing angel upended the tombstone and used it for a lawn chair. And Jesus was already long gone: the angel didn't roll the rock to let the Savior out but to let the witnesses in.

He walked out a winner, yes; he also walked out wounded.

"He showed them his hands and his feet," displayed, as hymn writer Matthew Bridges phrases it, "those wounds yet visible above, in beauty glorified." When John beholds him in glory, the risen lamb still looks slain (Rev 5.6). The Greek verb-tense denotes an unending condition. It takes a deep wound to outlast all eternity, and Jesus refused the anesthetic as it was inflicted (Mat 27.34). "No sweat" is the ultimate untruth about the one whose brow sweat blood in the garden.

The suffering Christ of Calvary does not undercut the triumphant Lord of Easter; it's the other way around. The struggle validates the victory; the price makes the gift more precious. The triumph was mighty because the struggle was massive. The wounds are not beautiful because they are glorified; they are glorified because of their beauty.

As we celebrate Easter, let us celebrate its cost as well as its conquest; remember the price along with the prize. Christ is risen, a pain-purchased victory that will require an eternity of praise to repay.

The Lord Is Risen!

Doug