

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Gospel: Luke 24:35-48

Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence. Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.

REFLECTION 1: AN EASTER PEOPLE

In today's Gospel reading Jesus instructs his disciples to be his witnesses to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem. And that's what we find St. Peter doing in today's first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. You see, witnessing to Jesus' ideas means more than telling people about the life of this great man, Jesus of Nazareth, who lived over 2,000 years ago, anyone can do that. Witnessing to Jesus means more than testifying that Jesus has risen – even the soldiers guarding the tomb did that. Really testifying to Jesus is testifying by our lives that the power of the risen Jesus has touched and transformed us in the most remarkable way imaginable. It is letting Jesus speak through us to other people – to be an Easter people. St. John in the second reading today points out what that implies; 'We can be sure that we know God only by abiding by his commandments'. In such a person says John, 'God's love comes to perfection.' (1John 2:5) Jesus summarized all commandments to just two, love God and love one another.

Love is the most powerful force in the world and to experience someone who has been transformed by the power of the risen Christ is awe-inspiring. Remember Gay Byrne's Late Late interview with Mother Teresa – even Gay, a seasoned broadcaster was dumbfounded by the encounter, as were so many others. The most powerful witness to Jesus often takes place without the people involved being aware of it. Recall how it was related of the pagan onlookers who met-up with the first Christians, 'how they loved one another' – sharing their livelihood and providing for the poor regardless of race or creed. So, witnessing to Jesus is testifying by our lives that the power of the risen Christ has touched and transformed us. We know that abstract ideas rarely move people, but let a person come forward capable of speaking to the heart, let truth flow from that person's life and let the person's power be matched by the equal gift of love, then people will listen and the dawn of better days will brighten our skies.

Those of us who belong to Jesus are really on a journey, 'on the way'. Our constant companion on the road of life is Jesus and those we meet upon the way are grace-filled opportunities for witnessing to the truth, peace, justice and the love for which he died. We are born to tell our story on the way and through sharing of experiences, insight is gained and lives are changed. We are all on the road to Emmaus, at first blinded by despair, still learning that Jesus is there on the road with us. He opens our minds and hearts to know that suffering of our lives is in fact the path to glory. We see Jesus and one another in the love made known in the Scriptures and in the breaking of bread.

One final thought, when we receive Our Blessed Lord in the Eucharist, the priest or minister proclaims, 'Body of Christ.' The communicant responds, 'Amen.' Scholars tell us that the word 'Amen' in Hebrew means 'truth', it's the truth. So, what we have received is the Lord of Integrity, of Truth. Henceforth we cannot be false to any man or woman.

REFLECTION 2: JESUS THE ADVOCATE

If you have read an Agatha Christie crime novel, you learn that there are several kinds of evidence. Eyewitness testimony is for someone who sees the event in person. Circumstantial evidence is second-hand information, while hard evidence is something that is proof beyond the shadow of a doubt. In today's Gospel, Jesus uses his own body to give his disciples real evidence of his resurrection. He didn't want the story to be clouded by the possibility that the disciples were imagining things and that he was only a ghostly apparition. He then wanted them to know that it was truly he in the flesh. He showed them his wounds and went so far as to ask them for food, which he ate in their presence. He was the same Jesus who had been taken down from the cross. Here surely was real evidence.

Luke's final resurrection account caps the message of Easter and the whole of Jesus' ministry. Chapter 24 of Luke began with stories of the disciples astonished at the empty tomb, followed by Jesus' encounter with two disciples on the road to Emmaus and how their hearts were burning within them. Luke brings his Gospel to a conclusion with this last appearance (Luke 24: 35-48) to emphasise two particular aspects of the resurrection. On the one hand the account emphasises the bodily presence of Christ. There were rumours going around at that time that the spirit of an emperor had been seen ascending to the heavens, declaring that the deceased ruler belonged to the ranks of the gods! So taking pains to distinguish the risen Christ from those myths, Luke relates a three-fold encounter between Christ and his disciples. Christ appears unfettered by the constraints of material space, and then identifies himself as the one who suffered, 'see and touch me'. The marks of his suffering are very real, not something one would want to dream up. Finally Luke says that Jesus ate in front of his disciples. This was no ghost or a dream – this was the mortally wounded one raised up, tangible but different.

The evangelists have no interest in emphasising the physics or biology of resurrection. Their concern was to point out that Jesus was as real in the resurrection as he had been from birth to death – the man born of Mary, crucified under Pontius Pilate and raised by God, so putting the stamp of approval on his life, death and message, leading us to contemplate that message again and again. We should recall that this group of people was not distinct from those addressed in our first reading (Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19). We remember that after the crucifixion, the followers of Jesus were shattered; they were petrified by fear, so Jesus' greeting to them is one of 'Peace'. It was Jesus who sought for his followers' reassurance and reconciliation for this fragile remnant. His coming into their midst was the supreme gesture, fleshing out as it were the meaning of his whole life, death and resurrection. The God of Abraham and Jacob, the God of Adam and Eve is the eternal seeker of communion with humanity that he preaches by the living parable of his life. Jesus came offering peace and so opened their minds to understand the scriptures in a new way. Having met the risen Lord and accepted his offer of peace, they were finally prepared to be his witnesses to all the nations.