

Third Sunday of Easter B2021

The readings of this third Sunday of Easter give an account of the resurrection of Jesus and the mission of the disciples. They show what the apostles had done in the aftermath of the resurrection in order to bring their fellow Jews to conversion of heart. They equally show how the apparitions of Jesus have contributed to the strengthening of the first community and to the clarification of the meaning of the resurrection.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles describes the speech of Peter before the Jewish people. It shows how he tried to convince them that the resurrection of Jesus was the work of the God of their ancestors in whom they believed. It also shows how he tried to convince them that, though they made mistakes and acted by ignorance, the time has come for them to convert and repent in order to receive the forgiveness of their sins.

What is behind this text is the idea that Jesus' passion and death were according to God's plan. Another idea is the truth that there is no discontinuity between the God of Jesus and the God of the Jews' ancestors. The last idea is related to the truth that those who have put Jesus to death bear some responsibility for which they have to repent.

All that helps us understand the point of today's Gospel as it relates the apparitions of Jesus. In fact, the Gospel relates two instances of Jesus' apparition, namely on the road to Emmaus where he was recognized at the breaking of the bread, and in the house where the disciples were gathered.

Then, the Gospel shows how, as the disciples were troubled in thinking that they saw a ghost, Jesus reassured them by showing them his scars and by eating in their presence. After that, the Gospel relates the explanation of Jesus to his disciples by alleging that his death was part of God's plan as a fulfillment of the Law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms. The Gospel ends up with Jesus commissioning his disciples to be his witnesses and to preach in his name to all the nations the repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about the reality of the resurrection and its consequences for us. In fact, it is very curious to find in today's Gospel very precise words coming from the mouth of Jesus, but which give to the resurrection its true meaning: "Why are you troubled"?... "Why do questions arise in your hearts"? "Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself".... "Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have"... "Have you anything here to eat?"

Such an insistence shows that the risen Christ was not a phantom or a hallucination. He was as real as the disciples knew him before. He was the same person with whom the disciples had community of life before he died. This confirms the words of Hebrews 13: 8 when they say: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever". If that is the case and we are dealing with the same person, what is the difference, then, between before and after the resurrection?

The difference lies in the fact that the risen Christ is not submitted anymore to the limitation of time and space which define the human activities. That is why he can appear even when the doors are closed. Moreover, the reference to the concreteness of acts like touching, seeing, eating, showing the feet and the hands, indicate that they are dealing not only with someone

who is real, but also someone with whom they have a common history they can remember even after his death.

One of the consequences of such a vision is that the bonds of friendship and the ties we build when we are still on earth will survive us even in death. That is why the resurrection does not wipe away who we are or what we have been; it does not destroy our personality. What it does is simply to transfigure us so that we become conformed to the image of the risen Christ.

This point opens up the possibility of reward in case our life would be conformed to that of Christ. It also opens up the possibility of punishment in case our life would not have been conformed to that of Christ. This point brings equally the possibility of being recognizable even after our death.

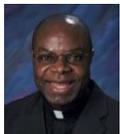
However, though Jesus is the same, his risen body has some qualities which are well beyond those we possess here on earth. In other words, though his body is made up of flesh and blood, he is able to do things that no normal earthly body can do. The most obvious is appearing while the doors are locked.

That gives us an idea about what our own bodies will be like when we eventually get to heaven. There is no doubt that, as we profess in the credo, God promises us a bodily resurrection. But, in heaven, that body will be similar to the resurrected body of Jesus. That new body will not be susceptible to suffering, illness, sickness or sin. That being said, I wonder whether we really need the cremation or the physical destruction of the body when we die. Is not the resurrection all about the body?

Moreover, here on earth, it is difficult to separate our physical bodies from our spiritual nature. This is why having an amputation or a face disfigured is so difficult for people. Losing our arms or legs means that we no longer feel that we are authentically ourselves anymore. But, all that will not count in the afterlife, because the corruptible body we have now will be completely transformed. It will become a body adapted and appropriate to the conditions of eternal life.

I pray that we be aware of the transforming presence of Jesus among us! I pray that we come to understand that every time we gather in the name of Jesus, he is present among us. Every time we listen to his word, he speaks to us. Every time we create a little bit of space in our hearts and in our lives for him, we start understanding better what we have not understood for many years. Our eyes open up, our knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures becomes sharp, and our lives start taking a turning point towards God. May Jesus open the eyes of our hearts so that we too recognize him in the sharing of his word and in the Eucharistic Bread! May God bless you all!

Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19; 1 John 2: 1-5a; Luke 24: 35-48



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