

Homily 3rd Sunday of Easter 'B'
Saturday, April 18, 2015

READINGS:

Acts 3: 13-15,17-19

Psalm 4

1 John 2:1-5

Luke 24:35-48

Good morning. "The Lord is risen alleluia! Truly He is risen, alleluia!" Today's Gospel taken from the final chapter of Luke's Gospel relates another appearance of the risen Jesus. In a few moments, we will pray the creed together and we will say the words, ... 'on the third day he rose again from the dead' and a little further, 'I believe in the resurrection of the body.' These statements are rooted in the post-resurrection appearances recorded by the witnesses of these events and reported by our evangelists and John. Last week we had the Gospel of John and the story of Thomas who refused to believe what he had heard from the women and the other disciples. Today's Gospel occurs after the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus recorded by Luke. As we meditate on these Gospels, we see some of the common features in all the stories.

First, the disciples of Jesus were overwhelmed with guilt, fear, despair and hopelessness. "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel." "The doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jewish authorities." "For as yet they did not understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead." Really, these simple men and women who had followed Jesus with great expectations that he "was the one to redeem Israel" did not know what to make of these events. They had given up and perhaps thought that the power of evil had won out after all and God had abandoned them. Then, unbelievably—we really have to place ourselves there—an event occurred that had never

before occurred in the history of human beings. Jesus appeared to them. Jesus had come back from the dead as He had promised! The initial response to these appearances is fear. Fear comes from our inability to recognize and understand the power of God's power and forgiveness. "They were startled and terrified, and thought they were seeing a ghost." Jesus immediately tries to dispel their fears. "why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?" As one commentator puts it: "We cannot escape our fears. ..We may ask ourselves behind what locked doors each of us is hiding. Our fear may be very personal, such as the fear of hearing that dreaded word 'cancer'. Other fears are unemployment, loneliness, and loss....Underlying our fears is the one that we cannot seem to talk about easily—the fear of death, our own or that of someone we love. Our fear holds us captive. It becomes difficult to give witness to the great joy that is ours—that the bonds of death could not hold Jesus. Jesus is alive."(Nancy R Blakely,Feasting on the Word).

The risen Jesus is not a spirit but is identified by the evangelists as the same as the Jesus who had walked with them and taught them. "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.." Last week's Gospel from John records the same thing. Thomas puts his fingers in the wounds in Jesus' hands and his hand in the wound from the lanceDo not doubt but believe." To make the point that it is really him, Jesus asks for something to eat and eats the fish that he is offered. Jesus' resurrected body is identical to his human body and yet different. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus until he broke the bread. Mary Magdalene only recognized him when he spoke her name, 'Mary' 'Rabbouni". What do we take home from all this?

First, in Jesus' resurrection we have the promise of our own resurrection. Like Jesus our resurrected bodies will be identical with our earthly bodies but different too. God's power will transform us. In the account of St. Stephan's martyrdom in the Acts of the Apostles, we are told that as he was being stoned to death, 'he

gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God and *Jesus standing at the right hand of God.*' A man standing with God—the promise of our own resurrection from the dead. Our belief in the resurrection of the body also means that are loved ones who have gone before us will be waiting to embrace us. What comfort that is for those grieving the loss of a loved one. "Bodily resurrection expresses the affirmation that the creature formed 'from the dust of the ground' (Gen2:7) is indeed good and what God intended." (Feasting on the Word). Secondly, Jesus passion, death and ultimate victory in resurrection means that our sins are forgiven. As John says in our second Reading, "But if anyone does sin, we have and advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." (Second Reading). If our sins are forgiven, so too are we freed from the fruits of sin, death.

Jesus was made known in the 'breaking of the bread'. The Eucharist is a present reality and the promise of the transformative power of God in our lives. The Eucharist is our witness to the truth and reality of the risen Lord. This power of the Eucharist, of the breaking of the bread to reveal the love and transformation that is possible is illustrated by a movie from the 1980's entitled, *Babette's Feast*. THE 1987 DANISH FILM *Babette's Feast* tells the story of two sisters in a remote 19th-century Danish village who never marry and live a rigid life dominated by their father, the pleasure-denying pastor of their austere church. Both sisters had opportunities to leave the village. But their father objected and they instead spent their lives caring for him. Many years later—their father is now deceased—they take in French refugee Babette Hersant, who agrees to work as their servant and cook. After winning the lottery, Babette wants to repay the sisters for their kindness and offers to cook a sumptuous French meal for them and their cold and barren congregation. The lavish feast proves to be an eye-opening, heartwarming experience. Meals can have that kind of power. Think of a meal where you sat down with strangers and departed with new friends. Perhaps that is why a meal—the Eucharist—is at the center of our worship and why meals

figure so prominently in the gospels. We all know of the Last Supper and the Wedding Feast at Cana. But less often remembered is the story of the dispirited disciples who, after the Crucifixion, head to Emmaus and along the way encounter a stranger. They do not recognize that it is the risen Christ who walks beside them until they all sit down to a meal and he breaks bread with them. A good meal has that revelatory power—we can come to know and be known for who we truly are. Share a meal today with someone you want to know better. Watch what happens when you break bread together

Let us return to our Eucharist as we continue to celebrate Jesus' resurrection. The Eucharist, as St. Thomas Aquinas puts it is present nourishment and promise of future glory. I would like to conclude with the words of one of the commentators on today's readings:

"Jesus appeared in the midst of his early followers. He brought change to their lives as they moved from (1) fright and alarm to (2) joy mixed with disbelief and puzzlement to (3) open and understanding minds and hearts. That marked shift in the core of their beings led them forth to take great risks, witnessing to the risen Christ. Jesus did not bring them security. Rather they risked all in following his call. For they had come to understand that Jesus had conquered the ultimate threat, death itself, and their fears were groundless. Jesus' words, Peace be with you' came to fruition in their hearts."(N Blakely, Feasting on the word)

The Lord is risen, alleluia! Truly he is risen alleluia.

Deacon Richard Haber