

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter B/2009**

The psychology of development teaches us that human growth passes through different stages before someone comes to full maturity of life. Among many factors intervening in this process, there is the experience of ignorance that each one has to overcome; the discovery of knowledge and the joy of understanding the reality of the world. For instance, we go to school in order to learn and know. Once we know, we come to new discoveries and a better understanding of phenomena happening in the world, etc.

This process, which is mostly human, can also be found at the level of Christian faith. In fact, the readings of this third Sunday of Easter talk about the resurrection of Jesus as an experience the apostles have had by passing through ignorance to the full understanding of the Scriptures about Jesus.

In the first reading, St. Peter witnesses to the Jewish people about the resurrection by telling them that it is the God of their ancestors who raised Jesus from the dead. Although they thought they were doing good by crucifying him on the cross, they had acted with their leaders out of ignorance. In truth, Christ had to suffer and die according to God's plan and in fulfillment of the prophecies.

The point Peter pursues is to bring the Jews to the understanding that if they have acted out of ignorance, now ignorance is no longer permitted. Now that they know the truth, they have the obligation to repent and convert to that truth so that their sins may be forgiven.

That appeal to conversion finds its echo in the second reading. First of all, St John affirms that if we come to sin, we have the assurance that we can be forgiven. Such forgiveness lies in the expiation of our sins and those of the world obtained in the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

If so, in order to be faithful to Jesus, we have to keep His commandments. No one can say that he knows and loves Jesus without keeping the commandments, otherwise he is a liar. What St John wants to say is that our faith in Jesus has to bear consequence in the way we live it on a daily basis. The dichotomy between faith and life is destructive of what true faith should be.

However, we know by experience that, in spite of our good will, things do not always turn out right. Time and time again, we fail in our commitment and sin. But, does God abandon us to our sinful situation? No. Rather, he forgives us, because his mercy is infinite and his bounty goes beyond our merits and what we truly deserve.

While such a statement comforts us in our weakness so that we do not become desperate, it also challenges us so that we work hard in changing and in becoming better than we have been before. That is the reason why St John presents Jesus as our Advocate before the Father.

In a modern term, we can say that Jesus is our Attorney before the Father. As we know, the role of an Attorney is to defend the accused, to do anything in his ability and find the extenuating circumstances that can allow his acquittal. As our Attorney, Christ sits with the Father at the divine tribunal interceding for us. How easy is our case now that we have such a divine Advocate!

All this gives us courage and hope to understand that there is no desperate case before Jesus. For that reason, nobody has the right to say he will never be forgiven the wrongs he has done in the past or now. Even if society or fellow citizens will find it difficult to forgive us, because of Jesus, we have the assurance that God will.

On the other hand, it means that nobody has the right to say that it is too late for him or her. Only a few things are needed, namely the confession of sin, the conversion of heart and the change of life. Is that beyond us? Is that beyond you? Well, I do not think so.

All that brings us again to the idea of true knowledge of God we need to have. Most of the time, people make a confusion between knowing things about God and knowing God. Knowing a great deal of God or religion does not make us necessarily good Christians. What is needed is a knowing that transforms us, a knowing in which we are involved and which, in the end, becomes love.

When St John says, "The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments", he wants to say that to know Jesus is to do what he wants us to do. This kind of knowledge is not acquired by study only, but also and much more by prayer.

As the Gospel relates, the disciples on the road to Emmaus came to recognize Jesus when they sat down with him and shared their meal with him. Then, their eyes were opened and they realized that it was Jesus who was talking under the appearance of the companion of the road.

When they went back to Jerusalem to report to the apostles what happened to them, Jesus appeared again, confirming what they already knew, that he is alive. The risen Christ, then, opened their minds to understand what was written in the Scriptures about him, how he was to suffer, to die and rise on the third day. The risen Christ made them the witnesses of the truth of the resurrection and commissioned them to preach to all the nations the repentance and the forgiveness of sins. That is the task of the Church; that is the task given to us today, which explains everything of what we do as disciples of Jesus.

Now, let me finish by referring to these curious words from the mouth of Jesus, but which give to the resurrection its true meaning: *"Peace be with you... Why are you troubled? 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"*.

The risen Christ was not a phantom or a hallucination. He was real. The same Jesus who died is the same who rose again. Christianity is not founded on the dreams of disordered minds, but on the historical truth of someone who suffered, died and now is alive.

When Jesus asks them for something to eat, he wants to tell them that the life they spent together on earth was not in vain; it remains for ever. In other words, what we do here on earth with Jesus survives us beyond death and is in anticipation of the life we will share in eternity with him. It means also that all the bonds and ties of friendship we create here on earth because of our faith in Jesus will last forever. Our own resurrection will not wipe out what we are, but will transfigure our being, giving it its full meaning by configuring us to the risen Christ. That is our hope I want to be developed in each one of us. Let us walk from ignorance to the knowledge and the understanding of the truth of the risen Jesus. God bless you all!

**Acts of the Apostles 3, 13-15, 17-19; 1 John 2, 1-5a; Luke 24, 35-48**



Homily Date: April 26, 2009  
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Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)  
Document Name: 20090426homily.pdf