

Third Sunday of Easter B/2015

The readings of this third Sunday of Easter account for the resurrection of Jesus and the mission of the disciples in the aftermath of the resurrection. They show what the apostles had done in order to bring their fellow Jews to the conversion of heart toward Jesus. 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 that his main concern was to convince them that the resurrection of Jesus was the work of the God of their ancestors believed in.

In his allocution, Peter shows that while Jesus was acting from God, the people rejected him and eventually put him to death. But all that was a mistake on their part, because they acted out of ignorance. Now that God has raised Jesus from the dead, there was nothing else to do than to convert and repent in order to receive the forgiveness of their sins. Because, as St John says in the second reading, Jesus alone is the expiation of our sins and of those of the whole world.

What is behind this text is the idea that Jesus' passion and death were according to God's plan. Because of the fulfillment of that plan, there is no discontinuity between the God of Jesus and the God of the Jews' ancestors. For that reason, those who have put Jesus to death bear some responsibility of which they have to repent.

All that helps us understand the stakes of today's Gospel as it relates to the apparitions of Jesus. In fact, the Gospel relates two instances of Jesus' apparition: one on the road to Emmaus in which he was recognized at the breaking of the bread, and another while the disciples were gathered together in a home.

The time Jesus appeared to the disciples, he wished them peace. While they were still troubled in thinking that they saw a ghost, he reassured them by showing them his hands and his feet. He even took a piece of baked fish and ate it in their presence.

After that, he explained to them how his death was part of God's plan as a fulfillment of the Law of Moses, the prophets and the psalms. At that moment, the mind of the disciples was opened to understand the Scriptures. In the end, Jesus commissioned them to be his witnesses, and to preach to all the nations not only how he was to suffer, die and be raised, but also how in his name they can receive the forgiveness of their sins.

What do we learn from this Gospel? The first thing we learn is about the reality of the resurrection. 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"?... "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?"

This insistence of Jesus shows that the risen Christ was not a phantom or a hallucination. He was as real as the disciples knew him. 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 and the indication of feet and hands, show 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.

According to this vision, it seems clear 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 clarifies the possibility of reward in case our life would be conformed to that of Christ, or the possibility of punishment in case our life would not have been conformed to that of Christ.

The second thing we learn is about the understanding of the Scriptures. Understanding the scriptures is a whole journey; it is not something sudden and immediate. It takes time to understand the whole meaning of the Scriptures.

It took the apostles their whole lives in order to come to the full meaning of the Scriptures about the life of Jesus as well as about his passion and death. And yet, they listened to Jesus' teaching very regularly; they saw the signs he performed in their midst, but their full understanding of the significance of his life came slowly with time. That is why, when they saw Jesus alive, they thought he was a phantom.

The spiritual journey of the apostles toward the full understanding of Jesus' life is the image of what each one of us sometimes goes through. Sometimes we pass through many doubts, uncertainties, hesitations and fears before we can feel confident that Jesus is with us. Sometimes, because of disappointment, failures in life, lack of success in endeavors, we think that God has abandoned us and has left us alone.

And yet, he is always present. 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. Little by little our eyes open up, our knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures becomes sharp, and our lives start taking a turning point towards God. Finally, we discover that God has always been with us throughout all the shadows of our life, taking us by the hand and guiding us in the decisive moments. Let us pray that the Lord opens our eyes to recognize him. May God bless you all!

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



Homily Date: April 19, 2015

© 2012 – Fr Felicien I. Mbala, PhD, STD

Contact: www.mbala.org

Document Name: 20190415homily.pdf