

Third Sunday of Easter Sunday A/2017

The readings of this third Sunday of Easter talk about the aftermath of the resurrection of Jesus. They describe his apparitions to the disciples and the impact of his living presence on the community of the early church. They invite us to recognize the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and in the Gospel.

The first reading of the Acts of the Apostles describes the speech of Simon Peter before his countrymen. It recalls the task of the disciples to convince their fellowmen that, though they condemned Jesus to death, what happened to him was the fulfillment of God's plan. It reminds them that the same God raised him from the dead because of his faithfulness and according to the promises made to their forefathers.

What is behind this text is the idea that the passion and death of Jesus was not accidental, but part of God's eternal plan. Another idea is that the passion and death of Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophecy and the proof of God's love for the world. The last idea is relative to the mission given to the disciples to be the witnesses of Jesus' resurrection.

This text allows us to understand the stake of today's Gospel as it recalls the apparition of Jesus to a group of two of his disciples. First of all, the Gospel says that it was on the same day of the resurrection that those disciples were going back to their village of Emmaus. It says also that as they were conversing and debating, with disappointment and broken hearts, over the events relative to the passion, Jesus himself joined the discussion, but they did not recognize him.

Then, the Gospel reports on Jesus' effort to explain to them the sense of the drama they lived as related to God's plan and as the fulfillment of the Scriptures and the prophecies. After that, the Gospel relates what happened as they were approaching the village where they were going, how Jesus gave them the impression of going farther, but stayed with them as they urged him to do so because it was too late in the evening.

Finally, the Gospel reports about what happened when the moment of supper came up, as they recognized him at the breaking of the bread, but he disappeared before their eyes. Then, it reports about what they felt as he was talking to them on the way by explaining to them the scriptures about him.

The Gospel ends up with the report on the return of the two disciples to Jerusalem where they alerted the other disciples after they had witnessed the apparition of Jesus on their way to Emmaus.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today, I want to talk about the hidden and lifting presence of Jesus in the word of the Scriptures and in the Eucharist.

What do I mean by that? Before explaining, let me start with an anecdote. In fact, anytime I read this Gospel, I remember my pilgrimage to the Holy Land. My last day in Israel and my last Mass was in Emmaus. As I was celebrating the Eucharist, I thought about Jesus' apparition to the two friends and what they felt as he revealed himself to them at the breaking of the bread.

The story of the two friends brought also to my mind the whole picture of human life, as it is made up of ups and downs, joys and sadness, happy moments and bad memories.

Like the two friends, we at times feel really alone; fighting with irresolvable problems, abandoned by friends, family and even God. And yet, we are not alone. God is always with us, sharing with us all these sad moments of our life.

That is what the incident on the road to Emmaus teaches us. Look at those two friends: they were broken-hearted and disappointed. Perhaps, they left their village in the hope that something good would happen to them in Jerusalem in the wake of Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God. And now, they had to go back home to where they came from because of the death of Jesus. For them, everything was over and they were left with nothing more to hope for. That was the subject of their conversation: broken dreams, broken hearts.

Now, here is the question: when we are beaten down and overwhelmed with problems, where do we find the strength in order to deal with our difficulties? According to the story in today's Gospel, two instances are very important as a space where we can find consolation and relief, namely the word of God and the Eucharist.

In fact, the two friends had experienced that when Jesus was explaining to them the events related to his passion and death by referring to the scriptures, their hearts were burning within them. That means, literally, that they felt lifted up from their sorrow and sadness as though a medicine was poured on the wound of their hearts. That is exactly what the word of God does to those who open up to God and offer to him their problems.

This does not mean that all our problems are resolved. The truth is that, whatever might be our struggle in order to find a way out of them, we have the assurance that we are not alone, precisely because God is with us and shares those times with us.

The second instance is the breaking of the bread. In fact, the moment of revelation came through the sharing of the meal. In fact, the meal is always a wonderful moment of sitting together with people and of sharing with them who we are and what they are. It is a privileged moment of approaching people and of spending some time with them in order to know them a little better. Jesus chose that moment to reveal who he was. He was not any traveler, but truly the risen Christ who was with them while they were struggling with their disappointment and bitterness.

That meal is the symbol of the Eucharist. In the Eucharist, Christ gives himself to us in order to strengthen us on our pilgrimage, with its ups and downs. If we have the eyes of faith, we can recognize Jesus coming to us in order to console us and encourage us to keep going and fighting on this journey of life. In a few minutes, we will come to the table of the Eucharist. Let us remember that it is Jesus we receive in order to continue to live. Let us ask Christ to guide us on this journey until the day we meet him in heaven and share with him in the eternal banquet of heaven. May God bless you all!

Acts 2: 14, 22-33; 1 Peter 1: 17-21; Luke 24: 13-35



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