

Third Sunday of Easter B2024

After the resurrection of Jesus, the task of the apostles was to bear witness to this great event by explaining to the Jewish people what happened and why it was so. For Peter, there is not a discontinuity between the God of Jesus and the God in whom his countrymen, the Jews believe. Our Lord's resurrection is the work of the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and forefathers. His death and resurrection are the fulfillment of the prophecies announced by the prophets. Jesus is not only a man, but also God. He is the Holy and the Righteous One, the Author of life that the father raised from the dead.

The aim pursued by Peter here is to make the Jews understand how wrong they were to deliver Jesus and to ask the release of a murderer, Barabbas. What to do then? The simple thing to do is to repent and to change their lifestyle in receiving the remission of sins in the name of Jesus.

The message of conversion is also the content of the writing of St John in second reading. If we come to sin, we have the assurance that we can be forgiven. That forgiveness is in the expiation of sins obtained in the death and the resurrection of Jesus. It is for our sake and for the whole world that he died on the cross. To be faithful to him implies to keep His commandments. None can say he knows and loves God without keeping the commandments, otherwise he is a liar and the truth is not in him.

However, we know by human experience that, in spite of our good will, things do not always turn out right; time and again we fall into sin. Can God still forgive us? Yes, because His mercy is immeasurable; it goes beyond our merits and what we truly deserve. While we are comforted by such an assurance of God's mercy, we are, at the same time, challenged to strive to become better and better. That is the reason why St John presents Jesus as our Advocate before the Father.

In modern terms, I would say Christ is our Attorney before the Father. As we all know, the role of an Attorney is to defend the accused and to obtain his acquittal. Our Lord sits with the Father at the court of the Most High to intercede for us. We have an assurance that there is never a desperate or impossible case that our Lord can present before the Father on our behalf.

No one has the right to say he will never be forgiven for the wrong he has done in the past or now. Even if our fellow human beings or society will find it difficult to forgive us, God will. Nobody has the right to say that it is too late for him. Only mercy and forgiveness exist before God. Only a few things are needed, namely to recognize the sins, to ask forgiveness and to change the lifestyle.

Now, what is the resurrection from the dead? The Gospel of Luke gives us some insights to grasp a little bit what it means. What strikes the most in today's Gospel is that when the Risen Christ appears to somebody, he is never immediately recognized. For example, Mary takes Him for the gardener, the Emmaus disciples see in him a traveler; the apostles think He is a ghost; Peter out fishing on the Lake of Tiberius thinks he is a fisherman, etc...

Why is it so? Why does some hesitation and even doubt persist? The evangelist reveals to us that the apostles found it difficult not only to understand what the resurrection was, but also to believe it. Their faith has developed slowly and uneasily.

It is true that our Lord manifested himself to them, and with many signs proved that he has entered into his Father's glory. But, it took time before the apostles could comprehend the whole reality of the resurrection. Their faith was not the result of material proof, but rather of trust. The resurrection, indeed, cannot be approached scientifically as we do with scientific facts. Faith is not surrender to evidence; it is a free answer to a call; it is an opening of the heart to the word of God. The fact that there are atheists proves that God does not force anybody or impose himself on anyone; he leaves us free to choose him.

The spiritual journey of the apostles toward faith is the image of what each one of us can go through. We too sometimes pass through doubts, uncertainties, hesitations and fears before we can become true witnesses of the Risen Lord. Every time we gather together in prayer, every time we listen to His word, our Lord is among us. Every time we create a little bit of space in our hearts and in our lives, we start understanding better what we did not understand 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. We end up by discovering that Our Lord has always been with us throughout the twists of our life, taking us by hand and guiding us in the decisive moments.

Let me finish by talking about the striking fact of the physical experience of the Risen Christ as attested in today's Gospel: "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. (...) They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them". Why all this insistence?

All these details aim to tell us that the resurrection has changed the life of our Lord, but he is the same Jesus the disciples used to touch and eat with. Although our Lord shares from now on into the life of Father's glory, he is ever marked by what he has lived during his thirty years on earth, like the shared friendship or the created human bonds.

Applied to ourselves, it means that our own resurrection will not wipe out who we are, but will transform our being, giving it the plenitude of its meaning. Like the disciples, we can deepen here on earth our relationship with Jesus in listening to his word and sharing his body and blood in the Eucharist. That friendship and that bond will never pass; our Lord will share with us his life forever.

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



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