

EASTER SUNDAY III "B"      APRIL 21/22, 2012

This weekend's liturgy brings the first part of our Easter celebration Easter Day to its close as we again contemplate an appearance of the Risen Jesus to the first disciples. These events were recorded by the evangelists for two reasons, first to witness to the fact that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead and physically appeared to those who had been with him prior to the events of his passion and death. Secondly, to offer "those who have not seen but yet believed" (Jn. 20:31) encouragement in their faith. We are part of this latter group. But how do we know and experience the presence of the Risen Jesus with us today?

Pope Benedict XVI can help us. In one of his writings the Holy Father tells us: "Not everyone saw the Risen Jesus. Why not? Why did he not go in triumph to the Pharisees and Pilate and show them that he was alive and to let them touch his scars? The Risen One cannot be seen like a piece of wood or stone. He can only be seen by the person to whom he reveals himself. And he only reveals himself to the one whom he can entrust with a mission. He does not reveal himself to curiosity but to love; love is the indispensable organ if we are to see and apprehend him. This does not mean, however, that the person addressed by the Lord has to be a believer already. Paul was not, nor was Thomas, nor were the Eleven either, for they too were submerged in doubt and sorrow. ...It was not a prior faith that created a Resurrection vision: rather it is the reality of the Risen One that creates faith where there was only disbelief or a cramped and grudging faith." Faith, faith in Jesus, faith in his Resurrection the Holy Father reminds us is *not* a reality of our making. It is a gift, an invitation to relationship offered us by Jesus. Paul, Thomas and the Eleven and the other early disciples struggled with their faith, as we do, but despite their doubts chose to respond in love to love offered by God in Jesus. This is Easter's message, and its on-going invitation to us.

Today's gospel concludes the story of the Cleopas and his unnamed companion's Easter Night journey to Emmaus. Returning to Jerusalem they witness to all they have seen and heard. And, as they do so, Jesus himself appears to the gathered community. We are given this story to remind us how Jesus continues to be experienced in his Risen life even today.

First, the Risen Jesus appears still bearing the scars of his passion and death. This is no ghost, or some sort of computer generated hologram. Here is a real flesh and blood person, albeit now freed from the constraints of earthly time and space. Jesus' wounds speak not only to the reality that it is the same person the disciples experienced before the events of his passion and death, but also to the fact that the wounds are trophies, medals of honor, signs of death fully incurred, inflicted, even embraced, indicating Easter life is beyond death. They show death has no ultimate victory, no lasting sting. We, in turn, are called to embrace divine life within the context of our bodies, the "Word made flesh" in us; through joy and sorrow, victory and defeat, carrying in our bodies the dying of Christ as well as his rising now even as we look forward to the fullness of his divine life being revealed in us in a like death and resurrection.

Secondly, Jesus greets those present saying "Peace" or "Shalom." This is more than an announcement of a cease-fire between former adversaries. In doing so Jesus proclaims the reality of the reconciliation, the "at oneness", the healing of the gulf between God and us caused by sin that Jesus has effected through his death and resurrection as the advocate spoken about in today's second reading. Our hope rests in this peace, in its unending offer to return again and again to oneness with God.. In turn, we are now called to work for the same peace among all peoples as we see Peter doing in the first reading as he calls all to repentance, to turn again to God.

Thirdly, Jesus shares a meal with the gathered community. In the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist which Jesus instituted on the night before he died, his person passed over sacramentally into bread and wine, his Body and Blood. Further, Jesus stated that every time believers would gather in his name and repeat his words and actions in that Last Supper the reality of his sacrifice of life to his Father in love would become present to those gathered, as it does once again today for us in this Mass.

Jesus is still with us. This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it in Christ Jesus our Lord.