

Third Sunday of Easter

The disciples hear from the two disciples who had recognized Him in the breaking of the bread along the road to Emmaus. Now Jesus himself appears to them in the upper room declaring peace to them. They are initially terrified, but His presence transforms them from frightened to joyful, amazed, if still questioning followers.

Jesus shows them that the resurrection is bodily existence even if of a somewhat different kind. He clinches this by eating a piece of fish. Did this perhaps help them to recall the many meals they had shared – and perhaps above all the Last Supper in which he gave them his Body and his Blood? Eating is what sustains our physical existence, eating his Body and Blood is what sustains our spiritual life. After all for Catholics eating is our central act of worship! By this meal we literally assume Christ into our lives.

The peace that Jesus proclaims to them is rooted in the fact that He overcame death. Questioning is part of faith's development. Jesus invites even poking and prodding.

Jesus then opens their minds to how to understand the (Old Testament) Scriptures, how to understand them as fulfilled in His coming and in His resurrection. The Word of God is our anchor and our truth. We read them in light of Christ. St. John in today's second reading writes that the love of God is truly perfected in those who keep Christ's word. Do you make the truth of God the measure of all other truths? Are you in submission to the Word of God? When God's Word conflicts with your own opinions or those your party or other grouping, what wins the argument for you?

Finally, Jesus gives them their mission: Preach to all peoples a repentance (changing of heart and mind, of priorities) leading to the forgiveness of sins in His name (authority). The world that they were going forth into was often cruel and violent, decadent and materialistic, devoid of much real hope for the future, escaping the grimness through fleeting pleasures. But, under the surface, within this society, were many souls ready to hear the good news that Jesus proclaimed. They were disenchanted with the way the world was (and is) and desired more than superficial distractions. People were impressed with the boldness and the peace which Christians seemed to experience and the freedom in which they lived a truly different kind of life.

In some ways we can see how our world has many of the same qualities as the world the Church was born into. There are also many today who long to hear – many in our increasingly alienated and polarized world, many caught up in escapism and shallowness. Of course, first, we Christians ourselves must take Jesus' message to heart and stop blindly trying to stay in step with trends that lead nowhere good.

We Christians can repent and reject the hold of an often cruel and spiritually empty world. We can dare to live not as slaves to the conventional but as free children of God. What are we afraid of? Fear of death? Fear of what others will think? Fear of not fitting in, of not being viewed as smart, successful, attractive etc.? These are Satan's tricks to keep us down, from finding our true identity as free children of God and helping others to do the same.