

## **THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**(Four sermons)**

### **THE LOVE OF JESUS FOR US IS TOO MARVELLOUS TO BELIEVE**

**Lk. 24:35-48**

It is shortly after the resurrection of Jesus. Put yourself in the shoes of the Apostles. You invested three years of your life in Jesus. You felt so fortunate to be one of His closest followers. You were mesmerised by the depth of His wisdom. You admired His strength of character, for the way He stood up to His adversaries. You were amazed at the miracles He performed. You were struck with the deep compassion He showed those who were suffering. They were very special years in your life.

The more popular Jesus became the more He was faced the wrath of the religious authorities. He was walking into a death trap. Finally, He was arrested and crucified as a blasphemer. It came about so quickly. Some of His Apostles had hopes that He would be the One to establish the Kingdom of Israel and free their people from the power of Rome. But it did not turn out this way. They were aware that they had failed Jesus. Only John, the beloved disciple, had supported Him. They were sorry for their cowardice and weakness. At the same time, they feared for their safety. If His enemies had killed their Master, what would stop them from killing His close followers? Of course, they were sad to know what a wretched end Jesus had come to. How brave He had been to endure the Roman scourging and crucifixion. But what about themselves? Had those three years been wasted? Where were they to go? What were they to do with their lives?

Now that Jesus was dead, they felt empty, depressed and dejected. After Jesus' death they heard very strange stories that He was alive. What were they to believe?

Two women who had visited Jesus' tomb told Peter and John that they had seen angels at the tomb and were told by them that Jesus had risen. They ran to the tomb to see if what the women had said was true. John saw and he believed. Another person said that Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene in the garden where He had been buried. That evening He appeared to all of them, except Thomas. They were filled with joy. But still they were not convinced that He had risen from the dead. All this news was too good to be believed

Later He appeared to two disciples on their way to Emmaus. They said their hearts beat with joy as He unfolded the scriptures to them, and they recognised Him in the breaking of bread. It was while they were discussing this last appearance on the seashore that Jesus once again appeared to them.

The disciples were startled by His appearance, in fact incredulous with joy. Jesus could see that they thought He was a ghost and made them look at His hands and feet, and invited them to touch them to dispel their doubts. He even asked them for some grilled fish that was there so that he could eat, and prove His presence to them.

Then He began to give them a scripture lesson. He wanted to prove that His suffering, death and resurrection had been predicted. It was all true. He impressed upon them that it had been necessary for Him to suffer, then to rise again for Him to redeem the world.

Jesus was telling them that if they wanted to be His followers, they, too, would have to carry a cross in some form. It was their turn now to be His witnesses, to carry on what He had taught them to the ends of the earth.

The works of Jesus are just too marvellous for us to assimilate. The fact that God our Father loves us so much that He sent His Son to die upon a cross for the forgiveness of our sins is too awesome for us to believe. How could, God, who is Almighty and Holy, take our human form and die for us on a cross as a malefactor? We can ask this question over and over again and not get an answer. Why should our innocent God die for poor wretched sinners like us?

Lord Jesus, Your death and resurrection are events too marvellous to believe, but they are true. This is what the Apostles and we have to believe. Now we have to be Your witnesses, telling everyone of the great love that God our Father and You have for us.

### **WHAT THE RISEN CHRIST WOULD SAY TO US**

#### **Lk. 24:35-48**

Suppose Our Lord appeared visibly in our midst this morning. He came through the door and walked towards us. We could see the scars in His hands and feet. He stayed with us, say some thirty minutes, talking and listening to us.

This scene is not entirely fanciful. It is essentially the one described in today's Gospel when, suddenly, He walked among His troubled disciples and spoke to them. What would the risen Lord say to us this morning? We are not qualified to speak of the mind of Jesus but, drawing on the conversation recorded by Saint Luke, we can make some guesses.

His very first sentence to His disciples put them at ease. Not only were they startled by His sudden appearance but also deeply troubled. His death was a traumatic shock. The cruelty they had seen made them fearful for their own personal safety. They wondered about their future ... where would they go, what would they do? And there must have been a sense of personal shame because they had forsaken their Lord at the time when He had needed them most. On top of all this they were trying to assimilate the reports of the Resurrection.

Why should we not suppose that Jesus would deal with us in the same way? To some extent all of us at Mass today will have troubled hearts and minds. We are bothered about many things - a job, money, children, marital problems or health issues, together with our personal sins. Added to these are world conditions of inflation, the decline in the moral fabric of society, international tensions, climate warming, the unknown future of the world. In our lives it seems we never run out of things about which to worry.

Jesus knows this. Those among us who would expect a scolding for our sins would probably be relieved when we realised that Jesus did not scold His Apostles for forsaking Him. There is very little record in the Gospels of Jesus scolding sinners beyond His telling them to reform their lives. But there are many examples of His very presence making sinners see themselves as they were which led them to repent. I think it would be the same for us now as for the people back then.

Once Jesus had quietened the inner turmoil of His Apostles and brought them peace, He began to remind them of some of the things He had taught them. He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures that dealt with the suffering, death and resurrection of the Messiah. They were already convinced He was the Messiah but they had been expecting something quite different. They were convinced that the Messiah would have established an earthly kingdom and restored the glory of Israel. Nearly all Jews expected that. This is why they were so baffled by His death. They could not believe that such a thing would happen to the Messiah. Then Jesus made them think at a deeper level.

Without a doubt He would do the same for us, challenging some of our ideas and stimulating our minds. Just think for a moment what a marvellous thing it would be to spend a little time in the presence of Jesus!

Finally, He would put us to work. Having put His Apostles at ease He opened their minds and He told them that they had a job to do. Their message was to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins, to the whole world. He concluded, "You are witnesses to this." The risen Christ would say the same things to us today.

Obviously, He is not here, as visibly and audibly as His Apostles saw and heard Him, but He is here in His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, in the tabernacle. If we would but listen to Him, He would still our troubled hearts and put us at ease. He would open our minds and stimulate them and, finally, He would send us out into a sin-sick world and put us to work. The question is are we prepared to spend some moments with Jesus, letting Him speak to us and do as He would wish, as He did with His first Apostles?

Holy Spirit inspire us to spend precious time with Jesus and allow Him to speak to us and hear Him commissioning us to go out and do His work.

### **THE PRESENCE OF THE RISEN LORD IN OUR WORLD**

**Acts. 3:13-15, 17-19; 1 Jn.2:1-5 & Lk.24:35-48**

In celebrating the Resurrection, we marvel, not only at the fact of the event, but also at the transforming effect it had on Jesus' Apostles. Each time the risen Jesus appeared to them, there was a gradual recognition that He had really risen from the dead. Initially, on seeing Him they did not recognize Him; they mistook Him for someone else, perhaps a gardener, or a visitor, or even a ghost as in today's Gospel passage.

Then He gave them one or more signs by which to recognize Him. In fact, in today's reading, He gives them two: the sign of the suffering He had endured, as shown by the marks on His hands and feet, and the sign of a meal, as shown by His eating a piece of grilled fish. These give us clues about two important ways in which we recognize Him in today's world.

The first is that Jesus is present in a very special way in those who are suffering in one form or another, be it physical, psychological or spiritual. The Church is the Body of Christ and, therefore, whenever there is suffering the marks of Christ's wounds are visible. This is true whether the person suffering is

ourselves, someone we know or a stranger. These sufferings come in different forms, illness, bereavement, broken relationships, persecution by others, the effects of war, or natural causes such as famine and earthquake. Strangely when faced with suffering, we tend to think the Lord as being so far away from us. And yet, by showing His hands and feet, the Lord actually reminds us that He is there, right in the midst of the suffering.

Very often it is only after the event, after we have emerged from the suffering, that we look back on it and recognize its transforming effect on our lives. This is what happened to the Apostles. When Jesus underwent His Passion and Death, they experienced such painful demoralization that they came so close to despair. It was only when Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection, and gave an explanation of the events, that they were able to understand the meaning of His suffering. He opened their minds to understand the scriptures, saying, "So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead." His suffering was thus part of God's glorious plan for the salvation of mankind. The resurrection of Christ should open our minds, therefore, to understand the meaning of our own suffering and that of others.

The second sign by which the Apostles recognized Jesus was at a meal. This was a symbol of the Eucharist which is the sacrificial meal of the Christian community. It is in the Eucharist that the risen Jesus is truly present in His body, blood, soul and divinity. It is in the Eucharist that He fulfils, in the most unique way, His promise to be with us until the end of time. Through the Eucharist, which is celebrated day after day and week after week, the risen Jesus is just as present to us today, in whichever country we live, as He was to those first disciples in Palestine. He is present in the Eucharist as the sacrificial Victim Who takes our sins away.

As St. John says in the second reading, none of us is without sin, all of us fall short of God's commandments, and if we say that we are without any sin, we are downright liars. But the awareness of our sinfulness should not make us despondent: by the sacrifice which Jesus offered of Himself to the Father, God's forgiveness is freely available to all of us. No matter how dreadful our sins might be the Lord asks us to repent of them, by turning to Him and confessing them in the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and making a sincere effort to avoid the sins in the future. This is the Good News of the Easter Proclamation, repentance for the forgiveness of sins in the name of Christ,

which continues to be preached to all the nations of the world almost 2,000 years after the Resurrection.

Holy Spirit open our eyes to see the risen Jesus truly present in all our sufferings and in the Eucharistic meal.

## **WE MUST TELL THE WORLD THAT JESUS TRULY DID RISE**

### **Lk. 24: 35-48**

The mind can behave very strangely. If it doesn't want to believe something it can act as though it never happened. It can also be presented with evidence before our very eyes and for some reason will not accept it. This is probably how the Apostles treated the Resurrection of Jesus. They had good evidence that He had risen from the dead. In the Upper Room on the evening of the day of the Resurrection Jesus appeared to them. He came through the locked doors and they saw His wounded body. Surely that was enough evidence that He had risen. Today's Gospel indicates it wasn't. They really thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus' body was not a figment of their imagination or the appearance of a ghost. Jesus allowed His disciples to touch Him. To dispel their doubts completely that He was not a ghost, that He was real, He ate before their eyes a piece of grilled fish. On the other hand, His body wasn't merely a restored human body like that of Lazarus. It was a glorified body; He was able to appear and disappear. Lazarus would die again, but Jesus' body would not. It was immortal. This is the kind of body we shall be given at the resurrection of the dead.

I believe that that there were two incidents recorded in today's Gospel. We have just mentioned the first. That first incident took place in Judea, perhaps in Jerusalem. The second incident occurred in Galilee. In this incident Jesus went through the Old Testament to drive home the fact that His role as prophet, His sufferings and even His Resurrection had been foretold. Let us look at the texts that Jesus would have probably quoted.

The entire Old Testament points to the Messiah. For example, His role as prophet was foretold in Deuteronomy 18:15-20. Moses told the people, "Your God will raise up for you a prophet like myself, from among yourselves, from your own brothers; to Him you must listen." His sufferings were prophesied in Psalm 22. "They tie me hand and foot and leave me lying in the dust; they divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothes." Isaiah 53 also prophesied His sufferings. "Without beauty, without majesty (we saw Him), no looks to attract our eyes; a thing despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and familiar with suffering, a Man to make people screen their faces;

He was despised and we took no account of Him.” Is. 53:2-3. His Resurrection was predicted in Psalm 16:9-11. “So, My heart exults, My very soul rejoices, My body, too, will rest securely, for You will not abandon My soul to Sheol, nor allow the One You love to see the Pit.” His Resurrection was also predicted in Is. 53:10-11. “His soul’s anguish over He shall see the light and be content. By His sufferings My Servant will justify many, taking their faults on Himself.”

With these words and more He opened the eyes of His disciples to understand the scriptures. What is important for us to believe is that the Holy Spirit does this in our lives today when we study the Bible. If we do not read the Bible how can we expect the Holy Spirit to enlighten us? Have you ever wondered how to understand a difficult Bible passage, or to get its true meaning? Besides reading surrounding passages, asking other people for enlightenment, and consulting commentaries, we should pray to the Holy Spirit to open our mind to understand, giving us the needed insight to put God’s Word into action in our lives.

Luke concludes today’s Gospel with Jesus saying, “So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in His Name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.” Luke wrote these words to the Greek-speaking world. He wanted them to know that Christ’s message of God’s love and forgiveness should be taken to the whole world.

Lord Jesus, You want the entire world to hear the Good News of salvation. How well are we doing in that department?