

Third Sunday of Easter April 19, 2015

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

In our journey through life we are confronted with several problems and difficulties which can make us lose our perspective. We can lose all direction to life and remain helpless. Then left to ourselves we become nothing and tend to remain with uncertainty. In such situations we need positive support, a sincere understanding which can place us on the right path. In the Easter context we see Jesus as a consoler and help to the disciples filled with fear. He comes constantly to them and remains with them, guides them and eats with them. By breaking the bread with the disciples and sharing the meal he makes them experience his real presence. Today we have another account of Jesus appearing to his disciples on Easter Sunday. The gospel begins with the story of the two disciples who had the experience of walking with Jesus and their recognition of the Lord in the breaking of bread. Jesus remaining close to them drives away all their doubts and unbelief by giving them the gift of peace. He asks the disciples to touch and feel him and experience his real presence among them. He remains as the real friend in their lives, and helps them back into confidence. The first reading of today gives us the sermon of Peter who tells his audience the way in which Jesus was put to death by them but his suffering and death brought life to the world. The second reading tells us that Jesus is the sacrifice that takes away the sins of the world. The author St John encourages people not to sin but to place their trust in Jesus.

In the first reading we have the address of Peter to the people assemble there explaining God's saving work that is fulfilled in the death and glorification of Jesus Christ. This address follows immediately after the miracle of healing the cripple by Peter and John. The passage is made all the more dramatic by the fact that while Peter was giving the testimony, the cripple who was healed was beside them giving praise to God for his healing. Peter explained to those present that the apostles were not the source of healing but Jesus who was with them and whom they had killed. He explains that during the life time of Jesus they did not understand him and they even sought liberty to a murderer while putting to death an innocent person. But all this was foretold by the prophets and this was God's saving plan fulfilled in Jesus. Peter feels privileged to announce that he and his companions were witnesses to the fact that death and ignorance is not the end of the account. God raised Jesus from the dead and the outcome of this victory is not punishment but forgiveness. If they reform their lives and turn to God they too will gain new life. Peter here uses several titles of Jesus, showing the faith community's love and respect for Jesus, describing him as Christ, God's Servant, the Holy and Just One, the Author and Prince of Life and the Messiah. He shows that Jesus is the son of the same God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In the second reading from the first letter of John the Apostle the author encourages his disciples not to sin. However he is realist enough to recognize that sin is a possibility in the lives of Christians. In such a case we can trust that Jesus will be our advocate with the Father and will expiate our sins. We are certain then that Jesus intercedes for us and we know that we are to pray, we are to do and we are to be, persons for each other. John uses the affectionate term, my dear children seven times, and dearly beloved six times in this letter, to show how concerned he is about his church. At the same time he tells them that we can be sure that we know God only by keeping his commandments. If anyone who claims that he knows God and does not keep his commandments then he is a liar, refusing to admit the

truth. John tells us that God's love for us is always present. We show a reciprocal love when we keep his commandment of love. This love is unconditional one, wherein we love others as Jesus loved us. In his instructions John encourages his disciples not to sin. Of sin, the sacred author says nobody escapes but points to the fact there is forgiveness. Jesus has chosen to befriend sinners through the sacrament of reconciliation which is a personal encounter with him. It means proclaiming the coming of the Kingdom among us. John reminds his disciples that God is holy and they too have the obligation to be holy.

The resurrection of Jesus is the greatest miracle that took place during his earthly stay. It is the foundation and the cornerstone of our Christian religion. The death of Jesus on Calvary proved that he was truly human. His resurrection showed that he was divine. During his public life Jesus announced that he was Son of God and spoke of his mission to proclaim the Kingdom of God. Through his resurrection Jesus won the victory over death to win for us the eternal life. The Gospels tell us that after his resurrection Jesus appeared several times to the disciples and each of his appearance was to substantiate the belief that he had indeed been raised from the dead. His task was to lead the disciples from a position of fear and doubt into a situation of worship and acceptance. Clearly this is the case in the gospel passage of today given by Luke to us. Today's gospel reports to us two events that are distinct in time but closely linked to each other. The first is the apparition of Jesus to his disciples and second was to prepare them for the mission. This apparition took place on Easter evening, after Jesus had appeared to the two disciples of Emmaus. Those two disciples had walked the seven miles back to Jerusalem to report the event to others and to tell them that on their journey to Emmaus the Lord had walked with them. They had talked to him during the journey and listened to his teachings but did not recognize him until the breaking of the bread. Indeed they truly met him by way of the Sacred Scriptures, which he explained to them and pre-eminently they met him in the breaking of bread. The disciples, gathered in the room, were hearing the account of these two disciples who have just returned from Emmaus after their meeting with Jesus. While this event was being discussed, Jesus mysteriously appears once again in their midst. Surprised by his sudden appearance the disciples are confused and terrified. He greets them with the familiar words, Peace be with you. The aim of Jesus was to bring peace into an environment of fear and consternation. Here indeed, as we see as in other instances in the Gospel, the presence of Jesus does bring peace and joy.

The second event was the Lord's preparation of the Apostles for their mission in the world: to go out and to proclaim the kingdom and forgiveness to all. These events are closely related to each other because they served to convince the disciples more fully of the extraordinary fact of the resurrection of Christ. Luke tells us that they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit. It was obvious that their first thoughts were not that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Understanding their fear and hesitation to believe, Jesus wished to correct their unbelief. He told them not to be troubled and there should be no hesitation in their hearts about him. First, Jesus presented himself to his disciples: he showed them his hands and his feet; he invited them to look at him closely, and even touch him, as he would later do for Saint Thomas. The purpose of this was to stress continuity and reality. The risen Lord who was there in their midst was intimately connected with Jesus of Nazareth whom they followed while he was alive. The difference was that now he had been raised from the dead and appeared to them as risen and glorified Lord. Jesus wanted the witnesses of his resurrection to be fully conscious of this astounding

reality: eternal life which is Christ himself. It was the reality that he was Jesus in his very person. This eternal life of his belonged not only to the immaterial and spiritual soul, but also, at the same time, to the human body, that element of the human person through which one enters into communication with others. The body of Jesus was glorified along with his soul and Jesus wanted his disciples to be deeply conscious of this. It was all part of God's plan. When we have seen something, when we have touched it, we are much more convinced of the reality of its existence and of all its properties than we would have been if we had merely heard about it.

As a further proof of his resurrection and to show them his physical presence, Jesus asked them whether they had something to eat and they gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate before them. This episode, in which the risen Lord eats in the company of his disciples, made his intention even more manifest. Indeed, the risen Jesus had no need for food: his body would live forever, without fear of ever lacking anything at all. Therefore, if Jesus wanted to eat broiled fish before his disciples, it could only be to give them a sign, that of the corporeal reality of the life that is his, now and forever. Jesus wanted his Apostles to be authentic witnesses to this reality, which had been proclaimed many times in the Scriptures and which was now fully lived by him that he was alive and will live forever. On the road to Emmaus Jesus unfolded the Scriptures to the disciples, showing how they pointed to his suffering death and resurrection. He did the very same thing in the room where they were staying. His interpretation of the Scriptures moved from the past promises to the present commission. The meaning of the Scriptures was not self-evident. Jesus provided the interpretation. Once they had heard and understood the Scriptures they had to become witnesses to Jesus in Jerusalem and to all the nations.

It is very interesting that Jesus did his teaching after the resurrection during the meal he shared with his disciples. This certainly reminded them of the Last Supper where he did his teaching and preached through his actions by washing their feet. He made them understand that the sufferings and death were only an interlude. He told them that he had spoken to them that time while he was still with them, that everything written about him in the Law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled. Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, 'Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead...' and now they had the task of proclaiming repentance and forgiveness of sins that is, total reconciliation with God to all. This calling could only be achieved by the grace of God the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit in the Most Holy Name of Jesus. As John says in his letter, Jesus is the sacrifice that takes our sins away, and not only ours, but the whole world. As we continue with the celebration of the Holy Mass, let us keep in mind that Jesus suffered in our place for the forgiveness of our sins. Like the first disciples of Jesus we too are called to be his witnesses in the world of today and spread the good news to all.

The readings of today tell us that our Christian faith is first and foremost a response of belief to the person of the risen Christ who will be with us at all times. This belief embraces the realization that Jesus has won salvation for us by his sacrifice of the cross, as Peter explained in his sermon. John in his letter reminds us that Jesus remains our advocate when we encounter the harsh reality of our sins in our lives. It is the sacrifice of Jesus that has made possible our proximity to God and the experience of his love. When reflecting on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus we are reminded of the model life of St. Maximilian Kolbe, who

was canonized in October, 1982. He was a priest from Poland and Nazi prisoner and sacrificed his life to die of starvation in the prison in the place of a young family man. Fr. Maximilian died of starvation after suffering with nine others in the prison. In this act of self-sacrifice, we perceive true Christian love. Here, one man gave his life for another on the Day of Judgment. Father Maximilian obeyed the command of love by living and dying in faith. Here the love of God had reached its perfection. By embracing the same obedience to the Commandments in the love of Jesus Christ, we know that we are in Jesus and that Jesus is in us. Then in our pilgrimage of faith, the action of the Holy Spirit calls for a never ending conversion of our inner most selves. We can help the process by keeping always the freshness of the joy and wonder of the first Easter.

It was a busy morning, about 8:30, when an elderly gentleman in his 80's arrived to have stitches removed from his thumb. He said he was in a hurry as he had an appointment at 9:00 am. The medico took his vital signs and had him take a seat, knowing it would be over an hour before someone would be able to see him. Since he himself was not busy he took time to evaluate his wound. The wound was well healed, and so he talked to one of the doctors, got the needed supplies to remove his sutures and redress his wound. While taking care of his wound, he asked his patient if he had another doctor's appointment as he was in such a hurry. The gentleman said that he needed to go to the nursing home to eat breakfast with his wife. On inquiring her health he said that she had been there for a while and that she was a victim of Alzheimer's disease. When the medico asked if she would be upset if he was a bit late, he replied that she no longer knew who he was, that she had not recognized him in five years now. The medico was surprised, and asked him, if she doesn't know who he was, why he went every morning faithfully for the breakfast. He smiled and said, 'She doesn't know me, but I still know who she is.' The medico with tears in the eyes said to himself, 'That is the kind of love I want in my life.' True love is neither physical, nor romantic. True love is an acceptance of all that is, has been, will be, and will not be.

Fr Eugene Lobo S.J. Bangalore, India