

My Brothers and Sisters,

In the 1970's, many articles were written questioning the bodily resurrection of Jesus. Did Jesus really rise from the dead? All of them agreed that the resurrection was a central belief of Christian faith, but many argued that the resurrection was a mythical or symbolic way of saying that the disciples experienced Jesus in a new way after his death. Many went so far as to say that their faith in the resurrection of Jesus would not be shaken even if his body were found today.

Scripture Scholar Raymond Brown, however, argued that the question was not whether we could believe in the resurrection of Jesus without his bodily resurrection but whether Jesus' disciples could have. Would they have risked their lives to preach the resurrection of Jesus if it were only symbolic or mythical? He answered with a resounding no.

Today's Gospel insists that the bodily or physical resurrection of Jesus really happened. When the disciples of Jesus saw the resurrected Jesus, they were frightened because they thought they were seeing a ghost. Jesus offered them tangible evidence that he was not a ghost, an apparition, a vision, or a spiritual experience. He invited them to look at his hands and feet and to touch him because a ghost does not have flesh and bones. He ate a piece of baked fish in their presence because a ghost does not eat.

At the same time, resurrection is not resuscitation. In almost all the Gospel stories of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, the disciples initially do not recognize him but then come to recognize him. This suggests that his risen body is, at the same time, both different from and the same as his pre-resurrection body. Jesus did not come back from the dead as Lazarus or the daughter of Jairus did. Unlike them, he did not return to his former life to have to die again. As Paul wrote, "*We know that Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him*" [Rom. 6:9]. In his resurrected body, to use the words of Paul, Jesus became a life-giving Spirit.

Why is the resurrection of Jesus so important? According to St. Paul, if Christ has not been raised, neither will we be raised. If Christ has not been raised, our believing is useless and we are still in our sins. If our hope in Christ has been for this life only, Paul wrote that we are the most unfortunate of people.

At the end of today's Gospel, Jesus gave his disciples their marching orders. They were to be his witnesses that the Messiah had to suffer and to rise, and they were to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name to all the nations. This is precisely what Peter was doing in the first reading. As he did in most of his preaching, he proclaimed the core of Christian faith, namely, that Jesus died and rose for us, and called his listeners to repent and be converted so that their sins might be wiped away.

With today's renewed emphasis on evangelization, the Church is reminding us that before we can teach the faith, we must proclaim the faith and call people to respond to it by repentance and conversion, i.e, by changed hearts and lives. In fact, for example, this is precisely what the ChristLife program has been about: Discovering Christ, Following Christ, and Sharing Christ.

My brothers and sisters, in today's second reading, John tells us that we can only be sure that we know Jesus if we keep his commandments. Likewise, we can be Christ's witnesses to the world and proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins to the world only if we strive to become sinless ourselves. John, however, assures us that if we do sin, Jesus forgives us, but his forgiveness is not just for us but for all people.