

3rd Sunday of Easter - B
Acts 3:13-15, 17-19;
I John 2:1-5a;
Luke 24:35-48
Little Flower - 4/19/15

My Brothers and Sisters,

At various times in their lives, most Christians, both Catholics and non-Catholics, question or struggle with faith. Today's Gospel reminds us that Jesus' own disciples, those who were closest to him during his life on earth, struggled with faith on Easter Sunday evening. Today's Gospel tells us that when Jesus appeared to them Easter Sunday evening, "*they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost.*" To prove to them that he had really risen, he invited them to look at his hands and feet and to touch him "*because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have.*" To further prove that it was he, he asked for something to eat, so "*they gave him a piece of baked fish, and he took it and ate in front of them.*" Therefore, it is not surprising that at times we question our faith or struggle with faith.

On Easter Sunday, we renewed our baptismal promises. It would be very interesting if all of us were surveyed about our core religious beliefs. For example, do we really believe in Jesus' physical resurrection from the dead? In today's Gospel, the two disciples who returned from Emmaus recounted how they had recognized Jesus in the breaking of bread, the early Church's term for Eucharist. Do we believe that in the Eucharist the bread and wine really become the Body and Blood of Christ? Belief in the resurrection of Jesus is a core belief of Christianity. Belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist is a core belief of Catholicism.

Tuesday is the feast of St. Anselm. St. Anselm is credited with defining theology as "faith seeking understanding." Because we live in a pluralistic society, it is more important than ever that we constantly strive not only to deepen our faith but also to deepen our understanding of our faith.

In today's second reading, St. John wrote, "*But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous one. He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world.*" Jesus is the incarnation of God's mercy.

You have probably heard or read that just last Saturday, Pope Francis formally proclaimed an Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy to begin on December 8, the 50th anniversary of the conclusion of Vatican Council II, and to end on the Solemnity of Christ the King 2016.¹ His proclamation begins by stating that "Jesus Christ is the face of the Father's mercy" [1]. If God is merciful and Jesus is the face of God's mercy, we as a Church and as individuals are called to be "*Merciful like the Father*" [13].

Pope Francis wrote, "The Church is called above all to be a credible witness to mercy, professing it and living it as the core of the revelation of Jesus Christ" [25]. However, when Pope Francis writes about mercy, he is not only referring to forgiveness. Rather, he is calling the whole Church, institutionally and individually, to be welcoming and compassionate toward all, especially those in need. He suggests we need to be open to God's mercy in our lives, contemplate its meaning, and then share it with others.

My brothers and sisters, in today's reading from Acts, Peter challenged his listeners: "*Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away.*" Perhaps the real meaning of conversion is to open ourselves to God's mercy in our own lives and to become more merciful, forgiving, and compassionate toward others, especially those in need.

¹Pope Francis, *Misericordiae Vultus*, April 11, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/bulls/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html.