

My Brothers and Sisters,

The empty tomb and the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus are the primary Scriptural evidence of Jesus' resurrection. Today's Gospel has two distinct parts: Jesus' third appearance to his disciples after his resurrection and his dialogue with Peter.

Jesus' post-resurrection appearances were designed to reinforce our faith in the physical resurrection of Jesus. In other words, Jesus' resurrection was not simply a spiritual event that caused the disciples to experience his presence among them. As Christians, we believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead.

In today's Gospel, as with his other post-resurrection appearances, the disciples did not immediately recognize Jesus. We are told that after fishing all night and catching nothing, they did not recognize Jesus standing on the shore. It was only after Jesus had told them to cast the net over the right side of the boat and they had caught 153 large fish that they recognized the risen Christ.

In each of Jesus' post-Resurrection appearances, the disciples initially did not recognize him and then came to recognize him. When Jesus rose, he did not return to the life he had before as Lazarus or the daughter of Jairus did. He rose glorious and triumphant. These appearances emphasize that Jesus physically rose from the dead but also that after his resurrection, his body was both different and the same as it was before.

The second element of these appearances is that there was usually something very physical about them. For example, in last Sunday's Gospel, Thomas said he would not believe that Jesus had risen unless he could see the mark of the nails in Jesus' hands, put his finger into the nail marks, and put his hand into his side. When Jesus returned the following week, he invited Thomas to do all of those things. In today's Gospel, Jesus not only spoke with his disciples, but he actually cooked breakfast for them.

The post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus both challenge and strengthen our faith. Do we really believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead? In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul emphatically states that if Jesus did not rise from the dead, our faith collapses: *"if Christ has not been raised, your faith is vain; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all"* [15:17-19].

No Christian or Catholic has ever told me that he or she does not believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead. What people struggle with today is belief in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. It seems to me that if we can believe that the Son of God became human, if we can believe that Jesus physically rose from the dead, it should not be all that difficult to believe that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist. If we do not believe that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist, it seems to me that we nullify Jesus' teachings in John 6: *"Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you"* [53].

The second part of the Gospel contains the dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him. Three times Peter responded affirmatively. Why did Jesus ask him three times? One answer is that Peter denied Jesus three times. Another answer might be that Jesus wanted Peter to understand that the love to which Jesus was calling him demanded total commitment because the mission Jesus would give him would require total commitment. Jesus then reminded Peter of the cost of that love, the cost of discipleship.

My brothers and sisters, there are probably three lessons for us in Jesus' dialogue with Peter. True love is less about feeling and more about commitment. Love for Jesus, or discipleship, leads to mission. Finally, there is always a cost to true love or discipleship.