

3rd Sunday of Easter - C
Acts 5:27-32, 40b-41;
Revelation 5:11-14;
John 21: 1-14
Little Flower - 5/5/19

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel recounts one of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances to his disciples. A couple of weeks ago, I saw an article in which a Christian theologian suggested that Jesus may not have physically risen from the dead but also suggested that whether he physically rose or not should not affect our faith in Jesus. Today's Gospel argues that Jesus did physically rise from the dead. With St. Paul, I would argue that our faith in Jesus Christ rests on his physical resurrection. St. Paul wrote, "...if Christ has not been raised, then empty (too) is our preaching; empty, too, your faith" [I Cor. 15:14]. Today then I would like to reflect on the basis for our belief in Christ's resurrection from the dead.

The first thing we have to acknowledge is that there were no witnesses to Jesus' resurrection. The bases for our belief in Jesus' physical resurrection are the Gospel stories of the empty tomb and Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. All four Gospels tell stories of women and apostles coming to the tomb on Easter and finding it empty. Likewise, all four Gospels recount Jesus' various appearances to women and to apostles.

Today's Gospel contains two elements that are common to most of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance. Initially the disciples do not recognize Jesus, but later they do. This suggests that the body of the Risen Christ appeared somehow different from before since they did not recognize him, but somehow the same because they did come to recognize him. What makes this appearance unique is that recognition came only after they caught the 153 large fish.

The other interesting element in today's Gospel is that Jesus cooked and served breakfast to them, thus emphasizing his physicality. In other words, spirits do not cook and serve breakfast. This is a common element of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. As you probably remember, in last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus invited Thomas to put his finger into his nail wounds and his hand into his side.

Some authors suggest other, less direct evidence of Jesus' physical resurrection. For example, Jesus prophesied his death and resurrection before they happened. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the Church grew and spread throughout the world. Finally, the number of people who have testified to the transformation of their lives through the power of Jesus' resurrection also argues that Jesus literally rose from the dead.

Those who argue that Jesus' physical resurrection does not matter to their faith are really asking the wrong question. The question should not be whether or not our faith would be affected if Jesus did not physically rise from the dead. The real question is how would the faith of the apostles and disciples have been affected if the body of Jesus was found or if Jesus had not appeared to them after his resurrection. I think most Scripture scholars would agree that they would not have believed in Jesus' resurrection and they would not have risked their lives to proclaim Christ's death and resurrection.

My brothers and sisters, twice in St. Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians he expresses in solemn form the faith, the tradition, of the early Christian Church. In I Corinthians 15, Paul wrote:

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve [3-5].

As we say when we baptize infants and adults, "This is our faith. This is the faith of the Church. We are proud to profess it, in Christ Jesus our Lord."