

3rd Sunday of Easter - B
Acts 4:8-12;
I John 3:1-2;
John 10:11-18
Little Flower - 4/18/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel continues the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus on Easter Sunday evening. After recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread, the disciples immediately returned to Jerusalem to the other disciples, and Jesus appeared to them again.

When he appeared, they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost. He asked them why they were troubled and why questions were arising in their hearts. Although Jesus was standing right in front of them, they had a hard time believing that Jesus had really risen from the dead. Therefore, he invited them to look at his hands and his feet and to touch him. When he asked for something to eat, they gave him a piece of baked fish which he ate in front of them. All of this was to convince them that they were not seeing a ghost or a spirit but his resurrected body.

Today some Christians struggle to believe in the physical resurrection of Jesus. The Gospels offer two very important pieces of evidence for the physical resurrection of Jesus. The first was the empty tomb. All the Gospels tell us that when the women and the disciples went to the tomb on Easter morning, the tomb was empty. In fact, Matthew's Gospel tells us that the Jewish leadership tried to bribe the guards to claim that his body had been stolen by his disciples [28:11-15]. The second was his many post-resurrection appearances. In each of them, they do not recognize him at first but then come to recognize him, suggesting that there was something different and something the same about him.

Today many Catholics struggle with belief in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. On the road to Emmaus Jesus celebrated a Liturgy of the Word with the disciples when he explained the Scriptures to them. He celebrated the Liturgy of the Eucharist when they arrived at Emmaus. Their response is in the first verse of today's Gospel, "*Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*" However, it is the sixth chapter of John's Gospel that Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist is most clear. As one example, Jesus said, "*For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink*" [6:55]. I would argue that if we can believe in the resurrection of Jesus, we should also be able to believe in Jesus' Real Presence in the Eucharist.

My brothers and sisters, this past year has been difficult for all of us. For many of us, the pandemic has challenged our faith. I am sure different people have had different faith struggles. However, two leading causes of faith struggles are physical and/or moral evil and innocent suffering, both of which have been very evident during the pandemic. I really do not have a good answer although I have to wonder if our inability to come together as a community contributed to these faith struggles. In the Old Testament we are reminded that God's thoughts and ways are different from ours [Is. 55:8]. Jesus was/is God's beloved Son, yet God allowed him to be put to death on a cross for our salvation. In other words, God does not ask more of us than he asked of his beloved Son. Finally, Dr. Martin Luther King once said, "Unmerited suffering born in love is salvific." All the sufferings of the pandemic can contribute to the salvation of the world. Our challenge is to avoid the temptation to expect God to act as we would act. If we can believe in the resurrection of Jesus and his Real Presence in the Eucharist, we should be able to believe in God's superabundant love for us even in the midst of a pandemic.