

3rd Sunday of Easter - B
Acts 3:13-15, 17-19;
I John 2:1-5a;
Luke 24:35-48
Little Flower - 4/14/24

My Brothers and Sisters,

During the Easter season, many of the same themes run through the various readings.

It is clear that on Easter Sunday evening the disciples were still struggling to believe that Jesus had really risen. When Jesus stood in their midst, *“they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost.”* Jesus tells them to look at his hands and his feet, specifically the wounds on his hands and feet. He asks them to touch him because a ghost does not have flesh and bones. He asked for a piece of fish and ate it. If they struggled to believe with Jesus standing right there in front of them, we should not feel bad when we struggle to believe in the resurrection.

The first verse of the Gospel is the last verse of the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. As they were walking, Jesus joined them, but they did not recognize him. As they walked, he interpreted all the Scriptures that referred to him. Even then they did not recognize him. When they arrived in Emmaus, they invited him to stay and have dinner with them. During dinner, *“he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight.”* They rushed back to Jerusalem and told their story, explaining how they had recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

Scripture scholars tell us that Jesus celebrated the Eucharist with them. Jesus walking with them and explaining the Scriptures to them was the Liturgy of the Word. Dinner was the Liturgy of the Eucharist. How do we know? The description of the dinner uses Eucharistic language: *“he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them.”* Also, when the men said they recognized Jesus in *“the breaking of the bread,”* they were using the early Church’s name for the Eucharist. That they only recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread tells us how important the Eucharist is to faith in Christ.

During the Easter season, several times we hear Peter’s preaching to the people after Jesus’ resurrection. Today’s Gospel contains the core of that preaching: *“Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”* Peter’s preaching in today’s reading from Acts follows that pattern.

As you know, the word *Gospel* means *Good News*. The preaching of the Good News always contains a call to repentance. As I reflected on today’s first reading, it struck me that Peter’s proclamation of the Gospel contained hard truths. He reminded his listeners that they handed Jesus over and denied the Holy and Righteous One and that they asked for the release of a murderer. He then called them to repentance and conversion. In other words, he called them to radically change their lives, to turn away from selfishness and sin and turn outward in love for God and others. In other words, he called them to become the-best-version-of-themselves. Today we should ask ourselves what are the hard truths we need to address in our lives.

My brothers and sisters, at the same time, today’s reading from John offers us hope: *“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.”* We need to always remember that because Jesus died once for all for our sins, our sins are forgiven even before we commit them. We just have to ask for and accept that forgiveness.