

3rd (QA&SJ) Sunday of Easter Year B

After last Sunday's Divine Mercy Mass a parishioner commented to his pastor about Holy Week and Easter Sunday celebrations, "*Thank God it's all over; and things are back to normal again!*" *Is it really over?* Many think Holy Week is just another week that begins on Palm Sunday and ends on Easter Sunday. All the praying, all the sacrifices, all the good works and kindness are buried in the tomb on Good Friday and what is resurrected on Easter Sunday are the old wicked ways that come back with a vengeance. All through this joyous week we have heard resurrection stories. Day after day the Gospels have spoken of the risen Lord's appearances to his disciples.

Does Christ's resurrection bring our Easter celebration to an end? — *No!* Christ's resurrection story doesn't end at Easter Sunday. Easter season is longer than Lent, and much longer than Advent; it takes up eight weeks of the Church's calendar—all the way to Pentecost. Even then, when we fall back into the time we call ordinary, Easter is the story we tell every Sunday. The *'little Easter'* that became the Christian Sabbath... *Sunday or 'Dies Domine'* because it is on this day our Lord came out triumphant when his light overcame darkness. We celebrate Christ's death and resurrection at every Eucharist. Every newly baptized baby will receive a candle lighted from the Easter candle; the casket of every parishioner who parts from us will lie in its glow at the funeral service.

St. Luke in our Gospel narrates the apparition of Jesus in the Cenacle on Easter Sunday. He emphasizes the physical reality of the apparition of Jesus – that it is not a product of the imagination nor some illusion. It was different from the resurrection of Lazarus, and was something very real and unique which the evangelist presents as physical to better convince us, his readers. *What kind of body did the risen Christ have?* Jesus' glorified body was different than before. Neither was it a ghost or disembodied being. *“Touch me, and see that a ghost does not have flesh and bones as I do.”* The Risen Lord could eat and drink. He appeared and disappeared whenever he wanted. He was beyond the laws of nature and could penetrate walls and doors. To prove that he really had a body Jesus had a fish barbecue party with his disciples. Perhaps this is what our own risen bodies will be like.

The disciples seemed skeptical. *Did he really rise from the dead?* Jesus' appearances served to strengthen their sagging faith shaken by fear, doubts, and misgivings. When the apostles spoke about Jesus, and in the breaking of the bread, Jesus made himself present to them and still does so to us in the Mass. The apostles were afraid, a normal human reaction in the presence of an extraordinary action of God. Their fear indicates that the resurrection was not something invented or fabricated; it was a divine reality which they had to understand and express according to their human capacity.

In our Gospel Jesus' last words and instructions to his disciples are centered on repentance for the forgiveness of sins to be given and preached. On the cross the first words of Jesus had been "*Father, forgive them...*" Which for us Christians could be challenging to utter to all those who may have offended us. The harsh words of Peter in today's first reading must not be misinterpreted as an accusation of the Jewish people for putting to death "*the author of life.*" Certainly Peter knowing that all sinners are implicated in the death of Jesus moves so quickly from condemnation to a call to conversion: "*Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away.*" He makes the offer confidently because he knows that, as the letter of John puts it, *by virtue of Jesus' resurrection we now have an Advocate (literally, a Paraclete) with the Father*, that is, Jesus Christ the righteous one, who is ransom for our sins. "*Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name... You are witnesses of these things.*"

How can we witness and bring Jesus' presence? To stand as a witness means most likely to be questioned or interrogated. To face the challenge two basic elements are needed: to know the truth, and to speak the truth. Just as we heard from the second reading, "*The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments. Those who say, 'I know him,' but do not keep his commandments are liars, and the truth is not in them...*" Jesus calls us to be His witnesses and these are

the conditions: *to know Him and His teachings, and to have a deep relationship with Him.* It is from this knowledge and relationship that we witness to Jesus with our words and actions. Our witnessing to Jesus is vital and necessary to a hostile world that doesn't regard the sanctity of human life and that thinks it can do without God.

St. Pope John XXIII believed that *“every Christian is the eighth sacrament—the only one a non-Christian can receive.”* Many people will cross our paths today that need to receive the sacrament of Christ. You and I may be visible evidence of the Spirit to those we meet today. St. Augustine once said, *“We are an Easter People, and alleluia is our song.”* Easter is our ongoing story; Easter is our faith, our hope and our joy. Easter is forever and we are its signs. Jesus is prompting us, *“You are witnesses of these things.”* When we bear witness for God, we also bear witness to our faith and to the Church that we belong to.
Amen!