

# The Third Sunday of Easter

(Year B)

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| <i>First Reading</i>      | Acts 5:13-15, 17-19   |
| <i>Response</i>           | Lord, let your face shine on us.  |
| <i>Psalm</i>              | Psalm 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9  |
| <i>Second Reading</i>     | 1 John 2:1-5  |
| <i>Gospel Acclamation</i> | Lord Jesus, open the Scriptures to us;<br>make our hearts burn while you speak to us. |
| <i>Gospel</i>             | Luke 24:35-48   |

The Third Sunday of Easter for Year B takes us out of the Gospel of John and into the Gospel of Luke for one of the resurrection appearances of Christ. So if you recall from an earlier video, one of the things I pointed out is, that during the Easter season, although we're in Year B, a lot of the readings are not going to be from Mark. Because, what they focus on are the resurrection appearances of Jesus and then on some of Jesus' teachings in the great Last Supper discourse from the Gospel of John. So if you go back, and if you have a copy of the Bible, and you want to look at the ending of Mark, you'll see that Mark gives us about eight verses that he dedicates to the discovery of the empty tomb on Sunday morning and that's it, in the shorter version of Mark's gospel. So the church goes elsewhere to get stories of Jesus' resurrection appearances during the Easter season. So this week we're reading from the Gospel of Luke and we're reading the episode that follows the famous account of Jesus appearing to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. So we're in Luke 24:35-48 and this is the Lord appearing to them and proving to them that he's actually risen from the dead and that he is not a ghost. So that's the story; it says this:

Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread. As they were saying this, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you." But they were startled and frightened, and supposed that they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do questionings rise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a

spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy, and wondered, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them. Then he said to them, “These are my words which I spoke to you, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”<sup>1</sup>

Okay, so again the context of this appearance of the risen Christ is shortly after his revelation of himself to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. That famous story where he takes the bread, blesses the bread, breaks it and then disappears, and it says that they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. So this is a subsequent appearance of Jesus, and in this case, Jesus appears to the disciples as standing among them, he says peace to you, which is the same thing we've seen in the Gospel of John, his standard greeting of the resurrected Christ is peace be with you or peace to you, *shalom* in Hebrew. And, in this case, though their reactions are a little different, it says that they were startled, that they were frightened because they suppose that they saw a spirit. Now the Greek word for spirit here is *pneuma*, it's the same word that's used for the Holy Spirit, or in cases of the Gospels where it will talk about a man being possessed by an evil spirit, it's an evil *pneuma* or a holy *pneuma*. But in this context, spirit can also mean what we would consider to be a ghost, right, the spirit of a person who has departed from this world coming and appearing to us after their death, and that's why they're startled and that's why they're frightened. And, it's one of the examples that we see in the Gospels that the apostles believe in the existence of the soul after death. They even seem to believe in what we might call ghost, in other words, the appearance of a person after death

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

coming to you but not in the body. So that's the difference there, they think he's a ghost.

And, so in order to allay their fears and to also prove to them that he's not a spirit, but that he's been resurrected from the dead, he shows them his hands and his feet. So what's he doing when he shows them his hands and his feet? He is giving them evidence of his crucifixion. So although Luke doesn't say it, the likelihood here is that he is showing them the wounds in his hands and his feet so that they can see not only that he has a body, but that it's the same body that was crucified on Good Friday. This is a very important point especially in a First Century context, because in the First Century A.D. there were all kinds of beliefs about the afterlife, there were all kind of differences of beliefs. So for example, the Jewish group known as the Sadducees believed that your soul just stopped existing. They believed in a kind of annihilation, they didn't believe in life after death, or what we would call the immortality of the soul. Another group, the Pharisees, believed in the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body. They believed that your soul went on after death but that it would be reunited with your body on the last day, the final judgment, at the beginning of a new creation, what they called the world to come. But, there were still others who believed in what we might call reincarnation, in other words, that somebody's soul could leave their body and then come back in a different person's body. We actually see this with King Herod after John is executed and Jesus begins preaching and teaching. Herod thinks that John the Baptist has come back from the dead in the figure of Jesus, in the sense that John's spirit is now living in Jesus. So what Jesus is doing here is he's distinguishing all those ideas.

He's not...this is not just the immortality of his soul. It's not a ghost appearing to them, like maybe a loved one who's died coming to you in a dream or something like that. But, it's also not the reincarnation, right, it's not his soul going into someone else's body. It is resurrection; it's along the line of the Pharisees view, that the soul and the body have been reunited after death. The difference being it didn't take until the last day for Jesus' resurrection to take place. His resurrection, instead of happening at the end of time, has now happened in the middle of time, okay. His soul and his body have been reunited in a new state, in a new form, so to speak, in a new glorified state, where he can appear whenever he wants to, where he can

pass through walls, where he can hide himself, he can veil his appearance; that's the characteristics, or the features, the nature of Jesus' resurrected body.

Now the disciple's response to that is fear and trembling, I mean they're afraid here. They are, as we would say nowadays, freaked out, right, they don't know what to make of this whole situation. So Jesus does something extremely important here in order to prove to them that the body that he has is not just the same body but is a real body, a real earthly body, he says do you have anything here to eat. And, so they gave him a piece of broiled fish and he took it and he ate it before them. Now this is extremely important because he says to them look, I have a body, touch me. I have flesh and bones, a ghost or spirit does not have flesh and bones, right. And even though he does that they still disbelieve, Luke tells us, which is pretty remarkable that in the presence of the risen Christ, I think most of us today, Christians today, would say well if I was there, you know, I'd believe in the resurrection; but they didn't, they just couldn't take it in. They just couldn't believe that the guy who had been scourged, and stripped of his flesh, and hung on a cross, and died on Good Friday, was now standing before them, completely alive in his body. I mean they had heard ghost stories before. They'd heard about Saul and the Witch of Endor bringing the spirit of the prophet Samuel up from the dead, they knew about that. But, this resurrection of the body of someone who had been crucified and dead for three days, this just...they couldn't fathom it. So in order to prove to them that he's not just a spirit and that his body is a real body made of flesh and bone, he actually takes a piece of fish and eats it in their presence. Which is as much proof as you need because ghosts cannot eat, right. They don't have bodies or stomachs, they can't eat a piece of fish. This is a sign to them that Jesus is actually risen, which is so important for understanding the Christian gospel. The Christian gospel is not just about the immortality of our souls after death, it's about the resurrection of our bodies. It's about the reunification of the body and soul in a new state for all eternity in our bodies. And, that's what Jesus is trying to reveal to the disciples in this resurrection appearance, the nature of his risen body as a real body.

Now with that said, he goes on to make another point to them and he says to them, look I told you about all this in advance and not just did I tell you, but it was written about me in the law of Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms. Now what does that mean? Well Jesus is saying something very Jewish right here. He's refer-

ring to the three parts of the Jewish canon of Scripture. Now what do I mean by canon? The Greek word *canon* is the word for rule or measure, and we use it nowadays to refer to the official table of contents of those books that are considered divinely inspired Scripture that belong to the Bible. In Jesus' day, the canon wasn't completely finished, it wasn't, you know, completely fixed, but already you had three groups of books that the Jews considered to be Scripture. The law, meaning the first five books of Moses. The prophets, which refer to the books of Samuel, and Kings, and Chronicles, as well as Isaiah, and Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; so what we call the historical books and the prophetic books, they group that as one group, the prophets. And then it says the Psalms, which stood at the beginning of the third collection known as the writings. And those three groups, the law, in Hebrew *Torah*; the prophets, in Hebrew *Nebi'im*; and then the writings, in Hebrew *Ke-tubim*. Those three groups of books...the Jews made an acronym out of that, Tanakh: *Torah, Nebi'im, Ketubim*, TNK. And, so today Jews will refer to the Bible as the Tanakh. So, they'll call it the Bible too, but Tanakh is the traditional Hebrew name for the Scriptures. So what Jesus is doing is saying to the apostles, look, not only did I tell you I was going to die and rise again, but the Tanakh, the Scriptures, the law, the prophets, and the Psalms, they all spoke of this, they all prophesied this, they all prefigured this; that I would suffer, that I would rise on the third day, and that repentance and the forgiveness of sins should be preached to all the nations.

And, then it says something fascinating here that I cannot overstate the importance of. It says Jesus opened their minds to understand in the Scriptures all the things concerning himself. So remember this, whenever you're studying Scripture, especially if you're studying what scholars call typology, which is Old Testament foreshadowings and prefigurations and prophecies, and then their New Testament fulfillment, that's not something that is just an academic exercise. It's something that actually needs grace for us to be able to see the connections between the old and the new, to see the prophecies in the fulfillment. Everything was in the Scriptures for the apostles to read but they still didn't understand it, they still didn't grasp what was going to actually take place. Even once it happened, they still needed Christ to open their minds, to understand the Scriptures. So this is something that I always encourage my students to do. Whenever you're reading the Bible, don't just open the Bible and start reading and studying using your own power, pray before

you read Scripture, pray whenever you open the Scriptures. For what it's worth, my own personal custom, I just have a little custom of saying, "Lord, write your word in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart; that I might know it, and live it, and teach your people." That's my little prayer that I pray before I read the Bible, because what I'm doing in that prayer it's just recognizing that I need God to open my mind if I'm going to understand the Scriptures. You can learn a lot in the Scriptures on your own power, but not enough, right. If they really are what the church claims them to be, namely, divinely inspired, then you need God's help to see the full depth of their meaning, especially hidden meanings, like the prophetic meanings of the Old Testament. So Christ opens their mind's to understand the Scriptures and then the second thing he does is he says you are going to be witnesses to this gospel. And, the Greek word for witnesses there is *martyres*, we get the word martyr from that. So we already see Jesus calling them into the mission of bearing witness, that's what a martyr does. *Martyréo* is to bear witness, bearing witness to the truth, above all to the truth of the resurrection, right. Not just to the truth of Scripture, but to the truth of the fact that Christ is the one who died and has risen again. That's the good news that they're going to bring to the nations, and that's the good news that he's exhorting us to bring to those whom we love, to our family, to our friends, to our coworkers, to people we encounter in our lives, the good news of the resurrection. That's what Easter is all about.

Okay, so with that in mind let's go back to the first reading. The first reading, because we're in Easter, is not from the Old Testament, it's from the Book of Acts. And, in this reading, what you basically have is a kind of short account of Peter being a witness, of Peter doing what Jesus has just told him do in his encounter with the resurrected Christ. So this is in Acts 3:13-15. The context of this is right after Peter is in the Temple in Jerusalem. He's just healed a man who was lame from his birth, and after performing the miracle, Peter starts to preach to everyone in the Temple, and this is what he says to them:

The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we

are witnesses. And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.

Okay, so notice what Peter's doing there in that little mini sermon, it's a little exultation. First, he's starting with the Old Testament, you always want to do that with the proclamation of the gospel. The gospel doesn't come out of nowhere. Christianity isn't some man-made religion that just springs up in the First Century A.D. It begins with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It begins in the Old Testament, in the preparations there. Second, then Peter moves into the story of the passion of Christ, who was delivered up to Pilate, who was denied, who was put to death, and who was raised again. And, Peter says something fascinating there in that one verse 15, he says, 'you killed the author of life.' The Greek there, *archēgos*, literally means someone who paves the pathway for others, who is the originator, who is the author, who leads the way. And, so Christ is going to be the author, not just of you know natural life, but of the life of the resurrection. He's the firstborn among all the dead, he's the firstborn of many brethren. And, the irony is that even though he was the author of life, he was God become man, he was put to death by his own people, and by the Romans, and precisely through that death then forgiveness of sins has now been brought to the world.

And, Peter says something fascinating there, you'll notice it says I know that you acted in ignorance. Now what does that mean? Well it's interesting, St. Thomas Aquinas talks about this in his famous work *The Summa Theologica*. And, one of the things St. Thomas says, and this is not an official teaching of the church but it's a fascinating theological insight and a claim that Thomas makes. What St. Thomas says is from one point of view the leaders in Jerusalem didn't act in ignorance. Thomas says they should have recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, that he was the one who had fulfilled the prophecies of the Old Testament and that he was the one that they were waiting for to be their king. So Thomas says they weren't ignorant of his messianic identity, they should've recognized from his miracles and the prophecies that he was the Messiah. But, what Thomas says in *The Summa*... he says they were ignorant however of his divinity, of the fact that he was the author

of life, of the fact that he was God made man. Because what St. Thomas says is the only way you can know, the only way anyone could have looked at Jesus who is fully human, and even with seeing him perform wonders and signs, the only way they could have known that he was also fully divine, that he was God, that he was the author of all life as well as a human being, was through the gift of the Holy Spirit, was through the insight of divine revelation. You can think here in Matthew 16, whenever Peter says to Jesus “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” how does Jesus respond? “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven,” right. In other words, Peter needed a divine revelation to recognize that Jesus was the divine Son of God, and the same thing was true of the leaders in Jerusalem. Paul actually says this too, not just Peter, but Paul says this in 1 Corinthians. He says that they would not have crucified the Lord of glory if they had known what they were doing.

So there's a real mystery here about the divinity of Jesus Christ and about the mystery of his passion and death. And, so what Peter is doing is he's trying to help the people of Jerusalem and say look, we know that you acted in ignorance, but God has now offered forgiveness for all who repent, even those who may have played a direct role in Jesus' passion and death. The gift of repentance is free to you. Just repent and turn away, and your sins will be blotted out, and times of refreshing will come upon you from the Lord. So it's a beautiful example of the fact that every human being, even those who were directly complicit in the death of Jesus in the First Century A.D., Christ died for everyone, he died for them all, as the Son of God who has become the Son of Man, so that the sons of men might become sons of God. That's really what the good news is all about. And, it's being held out here for the leaders in Jerusalem as well. So we see Peter giving a beautiful little summary of the good news, right. Old Testament prophecies, New Testament fulfillment, passion, death, resurrection and then the proclamation of conversion and repentance and forgiveness of sins, for everyone, whoever they are. Everyone, that good news is there for you, it's open to you, all you have to do is turn away and then believe in his name.

And that kind of gives us the bridge to Psalm for today. So the Responsorial Psalm is Psalm 4, the refrain is:



Lord let your face shine upon us.

It's a Psalm that basically says that the Lord will hear when I call. So it's meant to assure us that whenever we pray, whenever we cry out to God, especially if we, like the leaders of Jerusalem there, who cry out to him for repentance and sorrow for our sins, asking for forgiveness, that he hears that cry and he gives us that grace. Same thing is true in 1 John 2, which is the reading for today. I'm not going to read it in any length, but during the Easter season the church gives us readings mostly from John's letters and Peter's letters, because those were the two apostles who were preaching in the early days of Acts. And in 1 John 2 it says basically that, if any of us sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, right. So we don't have to despair of having sinned. You can imagine some of the leaders in Jerusalem maybe thinking, oh my you know, I killed the author of life, there's no hope left for me. No, that's not true. If we have sinned, we have an advocate with the father now. The Greek word John uses there is actually *paraklētos*, it's the same word used for the Holy Spirit, the advocate, the counselor. So both the spirit and the Son are our advocates with the Father interceding for us that we might be forgiven of our sins and made new in Christ. And, that's the message of this Third Sunday of Easter.

So I just want to close as I always do with some kind of insight from the living tradition of the church. In this case, I'll take it from one of the church fathers, a very famous church father, Cyril of Alexandria. In one of his commentaries on the resurrection and on the scene that we looked at today from Luke's Gospel, he talks about the reason Jesus showed his wounds to the disciples. So I just want to read that to you now:

To convince them firmly and absolutely that he is the same one who suffered... He gives this to them as a sign: his knowledge of the tumult of thoughts that was within them. In another way, he proves that death is conquered and that human nature has put off corruption in him. He shows his hands, his feet, and the holes of the nails. *He permits them to touch him and in every way to convince themselves that the very body that suffered was risen.* Let no one quibble at the resurrection. Although you hear the sacred Scripture say that the human body is sown a physical body but

raised a spiritual body (1 Cor 15:44), do not deny the return of human bodies to incorruption.<sup>2</sup>

That's Cyril of Alexandria's commentary on Luke 24. So notice there, Cyril brings our discussion to a close by eliminating one final objection to the resurrection that frequently gets made even to this day, especially by scholars who don't believe in the resurrection or who'll try to dematerialize it, or spiritualize it. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says that the body, the resurrected body, it says that or the human body, is sown a physical body, *psyxikós* in Greek, a soulish body, a body animated by the soul, but that it's raised a spiritual body, in Greek *pneumatikós sóma*, which just means spiritual body. And, some interpreters since ancient times have said, oh look it says a spiritual body will be our resurrected body. That means that the resurrected body is not going to have flesh and bone, it's just going to be spirit. And what Cyril's bringing up is, no, if you look at Luke 24, our resurrected bodies at the end of time are going to be the same kind of bodies as Jesus' resurrected body in this appearance to the disciples in the First Century A.D., and in Luke 24 Jesus' body is clearly a real body. Not only is it the same body because it has a wound, but it's a real body because it is made of flesh and bone.

So when Paul says that our bodies will be spiritual bodies, he doesn't mean that they're going to be immaterial or nonmaterial, what he means is that in the resurrection our bodies will be animated and suffused with the Holy Spirit. They will be *pneumatikós sóma*, spiritual bodies in the same way that now you have a soulish body, *psyxikós sóma*, your body is animated and unified by your human soul. In the resurrection you're still going to have your human soul, but your body will be suffused by the power of God's immortal, divine and Holy Spirit. And, that's what's going to enable your resurrected body to be the same body, but to be in a new mode of existence, what we call the glorified, risen body. So that's something to think about, it really is something to ponder the mystery, not just of Jesus's resurrection, which is serious enough, but the mystery of our own sharing in the resurrection. Because if Cyril's right, and Jesus' body was the same body in a glorified state, then that'll be true of us as well. In the resurrection on the last day, we will receive our bodies, the same bodies, but they'll be in a new and glorified mode of

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<sup>2</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on Luke 24*; trans. Arthur A. Just, p. 385-86

existence. And, not just for one day, or one year, or a hundred years, or a thousand years, but for all eternity. That's the good news of the resurrection.