

Easter Thursday

Holy Cross Regional Secondary School

5 April 2018

Dear friends in Christ:

Introduction

Easter lingers in Mass today, and in the selection of readings and prayers. Every day this week is celebrated as a “today” – as Easter. The feast is so great, so important that one day of celebration is not enough! So we have a week of Easters, and the Easter Season, which lasts until Pentecost.

Today St. Luke tells how the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, after recognizing the Lord “in the breaking of the bread” (Lk 24:35), returned to Jerusalem. Their encounter with the Risen Jesus filled them with joy and they went to tell the Apostles of their experience of Jesus risen from the dead: he was alive! What they had felt and heard and seen when he was with them made their hearts “burn” within them” (cf. Lk 24:32).

Retelling the Gospel

Then, back in the Upper Room, while the two disciples were talking with the Apostles, in the midst of their excitement, suddenly and without warning, Jesus appeared in their midst. How would you feel?

Probably as Scripture records, “They were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost” (Lk 24:37). As always with us, Jesus understands our situation and deals with us where we are with

our fears. He said quite plainly that ghosts do not have flesh and bones. Touch me and know I am real. Then he showed them his hands and feet: “See that it is I myself” (Lk 24:39). No doubt, it was the Jesus they had known on the dusty roads of Palestine.

Then Jesus made a surprising – and very reassuring – move. He says he is hungry. How much more un-ghostly could you get? And then he helped himself to the baked fish they brought him, just as he had done so often in their life together. He was “the same,” yet also very different.

But Jesus here is the focus of their instruction. Like a patient teacher, and you know what that means – he goes over once again, he reviews, the lessons he had taught them earlier during his public ministry, the meaning of which they obviously had not grasped at the time. He begins to explain the events that had seemed like pure disaster to them: his passion and death.

Risen Body of Christ as Fundamental

In this and in other accounts we can discern a repeated invitation to believe in Christ’s bodily Resurrection – the central and fundamental truth that binds Christians together. To deny it or attempt to transform it into a purely spiritual, inward event is to thwart our faith. St. Paul clearly affirms the stakes involved: “If Christ has not been raised, then

our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain” (I Cor 15: 14).¹

Despite the efforts of countless commentators and interpreters over the centuries to reduce these narratives of Jesus’ appearances to his disciples – women and men alike – to something neither quite so strange nor nearly so wonderful, one fact remains: those who had experienced Jesus’ dying now experienced his risen presence. Jesus’ Resurrection is real, not just “in the eye of the beholder,” but something that changed *him*, not just those who came to believe in him. This was no hallucination.

This Risen One is a Jesus of sight and sound, of love, tenderness and friendship. He ate, allowed himself to be touched and even let his wounds be examined. Yet, while recognizable, he transcended the conditions of known materiality. He would appear out of nowhere, pass through walls and closed doors, walk on water, and reveal wounds startlingly different from the open sores of his earthly trauma.

We, too, await the resurrection of the body, our bodies. Personal immortality would be incomplete if our bodies were not somehow part of the picture. Today’s Gospel tells us that we, like Jesus, will one day have a new bodied existence, truly related to our bodies in this world, but freed from their present constraints. We Christians believe in

¹ Cf. Benedict XVI, Regina Caeli (30 April 2006).

glorified bodies, resurrected bodies.²

Christians rejoice in the dignity of the human body, not just because it was created in God's image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-27), but because of the Resurrection of Jesus and his promise that we, too, shall rise up on the last day (cf. Jn 6).

By taking flesh in the wonder of the Incarnation (cf. Jn 1:14), the Son of God became totally involved in our world and gave it – and us – incomparable dignity. Any ethical system rooted in Christianity must take this amazing affirmation of Jesus' bodily Resurrection as its starting point.

Your Future in the Church

I know that many young people have difficulty finding a space in the Church where they can actively participate and lead. Sometimes you experience the Church as a place where you are considered too young and inexperienced to lead or make decisions as you would only make mistakes.

We “old-timers” need to trust more in you to lead and to be protagonists of your own spiritual journey. This is not just to imitate the way things have always been done, but to really take ownership of your mission and responsibility, lived out well.

² Cf. John Kavanaugh

We are counting on you!

Conclusion

If we have a “cause” it is the person of Jesus Christ who, as the Risen One, remains “flesh and bones” (Lk 24: 39). He has a Body. He is personally present in us, his Church and as “Head and Body” we form one Christ, one Body of Christ.³

In this Eucharist Christ gives his Body – possible only because he is risen from the dead – and makes of us his Body. Let us pray that as we recognize in this celebration the reality of being loved by the Lord, we may, in turn love others just as he has. Amen.

✠ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

³ Cf. Benedict XVI, Homily at First Vespers (28 June 2008).