

Homily of Third Sunday of Easter of Year A

We have been praying since Easter, that we may experience Jesus and the transforming power of his resurrection. We remember how Peter, crippled by fear denied Jesus three times. The third denial Peter said, "I do not know the man" (Matthew 26:74). Someone joked that if Peter was trembling with fear during the arrest of Jesus, and that was why he was only able to cut the servant's ear. Before the appearance of Jesus to the apostles, Peter and the other apostles locked themselves up in a room "for fear of the Jews," (John 20:19). The first reading shows how Peter was transformed by the power of Jesus' resurrection. After Peter had encountered the risen Lord, his fear was healed. He was then ready to die for Jesus. He began to proclaim the risen Lord without fear. He was not afraid of accusing the Jews of killing Jesus and called upon them to repent from their sinful ways. The story of Peter is a story of hope. It is possible for someone to walk out from the church today a transformed person, who has overcome whatever fear that had crippled the person. The Word of God and the Eucharist we receive are the ways we can experience the risen Jesus. May we be healed as Peter was healed. Amen.

We read in the Gospel how two of Jesus' disciples, in disappointment and in despair, were heading back to their village, Emmaus. For them to have left everything and followed Jesus, perhaps, for three years was a waste of time. That was why they were downcast. Then, Jesus met them on their way. Three major events took place. First, Jesus fed the two men with the Scriptures to burn their hearts. Their downcast was as a result of their heavy-heart. Their hearts needed to be purified. Second, Jesus had Eucharistic meal with them. The Eucharist opened their eyes, and they recognized Jesus. Third, they were empowered by the encounter with Jesus. "So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem..." Remember that the men had advised 'the stranger' not to continue his journey, but to stay with them because it was nearly evening, and the day almost over. In other words, it was too dangerous to continue the journey at that time. After encountering Jesus, they became empowered and they traveled back to Jerusalem that night to join the apostles and the other disciples. They were no longer afraid of the dangers of the night.

Jesus' encounter with the disciples gives us a good idea the meaning and the benefits of the Mass we celebrate. The readings and the homily are to burn our hearts, and the Holy Communion is to open our spiritual eyes to recognize Jesus. The Word and the Communion give us spiritual strength to overcome our fears and lead us on our journey of faith.

One other lesson we need to learn from the two disciples is the essence of hospitality, especially to strangers. Without waiting for the stranger to request for help, they asked the stranger (not knowing that it was Jesus) to stay with them because it was getting late. They provided the stranger with accommodation and meal. It was while they were sharing the meal that they recognized that they had been dealing with Jesus. Notice how humbly they welcomed him in their company when Jesus approached them on the road. This brings to mind how Abraham and Sarah (his wife) entertained strangers not knowing that they entertained angels. The reward was the gift of their son, Isaac. They had no child till then. Hospitality opens up gate of blessings. There are people who are kind only to their friends and their family members. There are people who are very unfriendly to strangers. Jesus say, "If you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? ... If you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that?"

Summary:

1. Let the Word of God burn our hearts and purify them.
2. Let the Eucharist heal our spiritual blindness.
3. Let the Word and the Eucharist empower us.
4. Hospitality opens up gate of blessings.

Fr Martin Eke, MSP