

Homily of Third Sunday of Easter, Year B

Since Easter Sunday, we have been reading and reflecting on the appearances of Jesus to his disciples, and the experiences of those disciples.

Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene who was weeping by the grave site of Jesus. Mary Magdalene did not recognize Jesus. She mistook Jesus to be a gardener. Jesus opened her eyes to recognize him. The effect of the experience was that Jesus made her the first bearer of the good news of his resurrection.

Jesus appeared to the two men returning to their village called Emmaus. They were downcast and did not recognize Jesus. They mistook him to be a stranger. Their eyes opened to recognize him at the breaking of bread. The effect of the experience was that Jesus empowered them to go back to Jerusalem to share the good news of his resurrection with the other disciples.

Today, we read that Jesus appeared to his disciples and they mistook him to be a ghost. He opened their eyes and sent them to be witnesses to the reality of the power of his resurrection. "He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures. And he said to them, "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."

These words of Jesus were preached by Peter as we see in the first reading. Peter said, "Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away." Peter who was fearful and denied Jesus three times became transformed by the power of the resurrection. He began to preach, boldly, to the Jews whom he feared.

Many people in our age do not know Jesus and do not experience him. Some see Jesus as a gardener; some as a stranger, and others as a ghost. They can only know him and experience him through us who are his followers. We are to share the good news of the transforming power of the resurrection to the world. St. Augustine once said, "We are a resurrection people, and our song is 'Alleluia'." St. Paul writes, "How then are they to call on him if they have not come to believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard of him? And how will they hear of him unless there is a preacher for them? And how will there be preachers if they are not sent? As scripture says: How beautiful are the feet of the messenger of good news. ... As Isaiah says: Lord, who has given credence to what they have heard from us? But it is in that way faith comes, from hearing, and that means hearing the word of Christ" (Roman 10:14-17).

We are invited to preach Jesus with word of mouth and by our lives. We are to be witnesses wherever we find ourselves. We are to let people know Jesus and experience him by our words and actions. Many Catholic are afraid to witness Jesus by word of mouth. St. Paul reminds us that God did not give us spirit of cowardice, but the spirit of power and love and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7).

We cannot give what we do not have. If we are to preach Jesus by word of mouth and our lives, we must first experience him ourselves in order to pass on to others whom we know and what we have experienced. Then, we can preach like St. John, "What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life for the life was made visible; we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was made visible to us. What we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; for our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:1-4).

We pray that we may know Jesus, experience him and witness Jesus without fear or favor, and that worldliness and persecution do not deter us. Amen.

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