

Sunday Homily

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

18 APRIL 2021

YEAR B

“Look at my hands and feet; see that it is I myself.
Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have
flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

Luke 24:39

Illustration

“From ghoulies and ghosties and long legged beasties and things that go bump in the night, Good Lord deliver us.” So says the old Scottish prayer, and so perhaps say a good many of us, for we can easily feel uncomfortable and frightened by talk of spirits and ghosts and other strange things that we do not understand. Then there are the science fiction programmes on television that have sent many a child diving for shelter behind the sofa, or requesting the comfortingly solid presence of an adult. And as we read today, the disciples were not made differently from us. When they saw Jesus appear among them, standing before them, very much alive, and they had seen him die only days before, they were terrified. It must have been very confusing.

Gospel Teaching

They had stood gathered about the two disciples from Emmaus who had walked and talked with the risen Christ, who had failed to recognise him in the fading light; but who had known him instantly in the breaking of the bread. But all of them, when he came and stood amongst them, took fright. They thought he was a ghost. The Greeks saw reality in terms of concepts, of universal truths, but to the Jews, reality was particular and concrete. And so the resurrection was particular and concrete, not just a concept. Jesus really did come and stand with his disciples, risen from the dead. Thomas famously had need to touch in order to believe, and Christ understood that need. “A ghost”, he said, “does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have,” and, for final confirmation of his physical reality, he asked for some food. They gave him a piece of fish and watched him eat it.

There is a playfulness and humour in Jesus’ words and actions, as he asks, “Why are you frightened? Never before seen a dead man eating?” The way Jesus teases them is part of what helps them to accept that it is really him, really alive.

This sense of Christ’s reality, this absolute certainty that he had risen from the dead and was with them again, came before the strengthening and deepening

understanding which was the gift of the Holy Spirit. Unless they were sure, how could they preach with conviction? The faith of those who came after them would be based on that certainty.

In the first reading, which jumps ahead of the Gospel story, we see Peter, in the new-found courage of the Pentecostal Spirit, reminding the Jews that they had disowned Jesus, the same Jesus whom he too had disowned before a serving maid. But now he knows and we hear the confident affirmation of this faith – a faith that has transformed his life in every way. And 1 John 2:2 attests that this Christ is the sacrifice which has taken away our sins and that we too can know him if we keep his commandments.

What a marvellous promise is contained in these words! When Christ is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. It reminds us too of who we are – we are children of God, with all the promises of inheritance that come with that status. As believers we are not just acquaintances, not just friends, but children, members of the family: we are meant to be here; we belong.

Application

We do not have to do anything different or special. In our ordinary daily events, our walking and talking and working, if we do all these according to what we believe to be right, then Christ is risen and amongst us. He will live in our hearts, speak through our words, see with our eyes and reach out to others through the touch of our hands. The three years of his ministry are extended into the lives of all who believe in him, in whom God's love is coming into perfection.

It is an awesome thought to understand that people may see Christ in us, because of our status as children of God, because of our relationship with him. We have our part to play in the ever-extending family of God, in helping people to see that they too can be children of God, they too can find eternal life through Jesus. Let us be encouraged and awed as we contemplate some of the tremendous implications that come from a living faith in Christ.