

3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER, B
COME, SEE, TOUCH AND EAT

“Look at My feet ... Touch me ... He showed them His hands and feet ... And they offered Him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes” (Lk. 24: 39, 40, 42-43)

On this Third Sunday of Easter, we continue to reflect on the theme of Christ’s appearances to His disciples after His Resurrection. Why was it necessary that He should appear so many times to the disciples? Why was it difficult for the apostles to understand the fact of the Resurrection? What responsibilities did the Resurrection of Christ impose on the disciples? In what ways does the Resurrection of Christ challenge us today? These and similar questions are addressed in the Readings that the Church presents to us today, especially in the Gospel (Lk. 24: 35-48).

On The Appearance of Jesus: We have St. Luke’s account of the appearance of Jesus on the evening of the first day of the Resurrection after the two disciples have returned from Emmaus, where He appeared to them earlier and revealed Himself at the “breaking of the bread” (Lk. 24: 1-35). The narrative we have here is the third appearance of Jesus on the very day of His Resurrection – He appeared first to Mary Magdalene (and the other women) in the early hours (Matt. 28: 1-8; Mk. 16: 9-11; Lk. 24: 1-12; Jn. 20: 1-18), to the disciples on the way to Emmaus (Mk. 16 12-13; Lk. 24: 1-35) and then this time. According to John’s account, this is the occasion that Thomas was absent – it was ‘On the evening of that same” (Jn. 20: 19-25). Jesus makes His sudden appearance while the disciples are behind closed doors in the cenacle “for fear of the Jews” (Jn. 20: 19). The disciples are troubled, terrified and alarmed. This recalls the reactions of Zechariah (Lk. 1: 12), Mary (Lk. 1: 29), the shepherds (Lk. 2: 9) at the appearance of the angel. Mary Magdalene was equally terrified and afraid when Jesus appeared to her earlier. Every divine apparition evokes a profound sense of fear and trepidation. But this fear does not last as the divine persona always speaks words of courage to calm and dispel it as quickly as possible. Here Jesus greets the disciples: “Peace be with you.” A regular greeting among the Jews to this day. This time, it is more than that: Jesus the Prince of Peace (Is. 9: 6) is imparting the authentic gift of His Resurrection to those who will soon become messengers and instruments of His peace. The appearance of Jesus is to dispel the fears of the apostles to open their hearts to understand the message of the Risen Lord. This is a prerequisite for the mission that they are about to be commissioned with. Jesus comes to us today in different ways breaking through the closed doors of our fears and doubts; closed doors of our secret and unconfessed sins; closed doors of our doubts and despair. He comes not to chide and condemn but to set us free and give us release. He comes to teach and give us the courage to become bearers of His message to the whole world.

Proofs of His Resurrection: Then Jesus proceeds in three ways to prove His Bodily Resurrection. The Resurrection was an entirely new phenomenon that the disciples were struggling with. Therefore, if they were to go out there and witness it, they had to be convinced, for no one can witness anything he/she is not certain about. First, He invites them

to use their sense of sight: "Look at My hands and feet." Secondly, to use their sense of touch: "Touch Me and see for yourselves." Their reaction accelerates from fear to joy. The words of the Psalmist are recalled here: "In the presence of God, there is fullness of joy" (Ps. 16: 11). Yet, they still find the whole experience unbelievable. St Augustine says: "It was incredible. And they had to be persuaded of the truth of it, not only by their eyes but by their hands too, so that through the bodily senses faith might come down into the heart, and faith coming down into the heart might be preached throughout the world, to people who neither saw nor touched and yet believed." From looking and seeing, Jesus proceeds to "something to eat." A piece of "grilled fish" is given "which He took and ate before their eyes." A more convincing proof, you would say, for ghosts have no bodies and cannot eat. The progressive demonstration of Jesus' proofs of His Resurrection draws a significant similarity with the incident in the garden of Eden our first parents "saw" the fruits, "touched" it and "ate". This again points to the fact that the Second Adam, is undoing and reversing the consequences of the actions of the First Adam. For whereas, the First Adam saw, touched and ate it to our death; we now, by the power of the Resurrection of the Second Adam, see, touch and eat to eternal life. The Risen Lord is not a phantom or some figment of hallucination. He is real. The Resurrection was a historical fact. This is the foundation of our faith; "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is empty and your faith comes to nothing ... your faith is futile ... But Christ has been truly raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. (1 Cor. 15: 14, 17, 20).

The Fulfilment of the Scripture: In the next part of the encounter, Jesus opens the minds of the disciples to the necessity of the Cross. The Cross is neither an accident nor an emergency measure hurriedly put in place to handle an unexpected situation; it is a pre-planned, purposely designed strategy with the specific teleological aim in the mind of God. The Cross is the fulfilment of all that had been written by Moses, in the Psalms and the prophets. "It was ordained that the Messiah should suffer and die; and on the third rise from the dead." Therefore, His Death is a purposeful fulfilment. It signifies our death to what St. Paul calls the "old-self" – to die to our weaknesses, doubts and the fears that prevent us from sustaining a grace-filled and constructive relationship with God and neighbours.

The Mission of the Apostles, The Mission of the Church: Jesus then progresses to present to the disciples what I like to call "The access code or the password" to experiencing the gifts of God that will become their mission and task, namely to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations. Preaching repentance was the mission of John's and Jesus' public ministry (Matt. 3: 2; 4: 17; Mk. 1: 15). The disciples are to follow in the same forte as a sign of consistency, importance and emphasis. Since God does not force His gifts on us, we human beings have to freely choose to repent, seek forgiveness and thus create a homely space in our hearts for the Christ, Who stands and knocks (Rev. 3: 20). We see these themes of repentance and forgiveness run through all our Readings today. In the First Reading (Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19) Peter in his second address, which takes place at the Portico of Solomon in Jerusalem reminds the Jewish assembly of their cherished history but pointed out that they acted out of sync in handing over Jesus to be crucified. Like Jesus on the Cross,

Peter makes excuse for them: “Now I know brothers, that neither you nor your leaders had any idea what you were really doing.” Then he shows them the door out of their sin: “Now you must repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.” St. John, in the Second Reading (1 Jn. 2: 1-5) reminds us: “If anyone should sin, we have an advocate with the Father”, Who pleads on our behalf when we freely repent and turn to the Lord.

My dear friends, today Jesus invites us to come: to see Him, touch Him and eat of Him in the Eucharist. He comes to us, breaking the darkness of our fears and self-condemnation, to shine the light of His love, forgiveness and confidence on us. He challenges us to go out there and be bearers of the good news of His Resurrection. He says to us, as He did to His disciples: “You are witnesses to this.” May the grace of God be sufficient for us.