

## Homily – April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2024 – Third Sunday of Easter



This gospel story is a story within a story within another story. The risen Jesus appears to his disciples and reassures them that he is not a ghost and that he still has a fondness, in his risen state, for a good snack of fish. It's a

continuation of the story of how Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and how ***he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*** Hmm. I wonder if this is going to happen again? Pretend you never heard the story.

You might recall from last Sunday's gospel reading, from John's gospel, that Jesus appeared to his disciples, who barricaded themselves in the Upper Room, and he said to them, "***Peace be with you.***" Similarly, in today's Gospel of Luke, Jesus also appears out of nowhere and says the exact same thing, "Peace be with you."

Peace in a Biblical sense, is not simply the absence of war or violence. Peace is the restoration of relationships. Every time you and I are in the process of restoring a relationship that has gone sour, we find peace. Among the first words out of Jesus' mouth as he began his public ministry was, "***Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.***" When you are in the process of bringing peace to a relationship, even for the briefest of time, you feel you are being generated by God; you feel God is giving birth to you as a "child of God." You feel you are being born anew. I've never had, at any point in my faith journey, moments of ecstasy, moments of apparitions, or moments that absolutely solidified my faith. However, I've had countless experiences of striving to live Christ's teaching, amid more failures than successes, which resulted in a deep inner peace. I draw life and courage from just trying to be faithful and not from any actual success. Although I secretly desire that the Lord would throw me a bone, now and again, a success here and there, to keep me moving forward.

One of the great spiritual masters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a Trappist monk named Thomas Merton. Here's part of what he wrote in a poem near the end of his shortened life. ***My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end, nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.***

***I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.*** The poem goes on. I take great solace in the fact that this man, who was so close to God, throws me a lifeline, so to speak, by saying that it's my desire alone that pleases God and not how I come out on the balance sheet of successes and failures.

When Jesus appeared to the disciples in today's gospel, he didn't demand a reckoning for why they all abandoned him during his arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Instead, he breathed his peace on them. He was generating them anew as children of God. Without ever mentioning their past failures, which were obvious, he re-instilled his confidence in them that they could bear good fruit in the present. He asked something of them; he asked them to feed him. ***"Have you anything here to eat?"*** It's as if Jesus was saying, "I still believe you can feed me. Wherever you find people in this world, hungering for food, shelter, clothing, companionship, attention, love, meaning, or simply to be noticed, I believe you have the power to feed them. I'm leaving you now, so that you can go and find me in them."

This is the ending of Luke's gospel and it's a lot like the ending of John's gospel. At the end of John's gospel, the Risen Lord appears to the disciples on the seashore of Galilee and says to Peter, "Feed my sheep and tend to my lambs." Talk about installing confidence in someone who has failure in his teeth and self-loathing in his heart. Peter realized, in that moment, that Jesus wasn't there to correct him but to show him the potential that lies within him!

These Easter resurrection stories are called "appearance stories" but they hardly qualify as appearance stories. Jesus appears to his disciples, he's not recognized,

and the moment he is recognized, he quickly disappears. I think these cameo appearances are deliberately brief in order to lessen the chance of us getting too attached to his physical state. If we get too attached to his physical state, we'll never go and discover his presence in the world. It's a little bit like when the Risen Lord appeared to Mary Magdalene at the empty tomb and warned her not to cling to him. We have to let go of Jesus' physical presence in order to have hands open enough to welcome him in his resurrected state. That's also true of anyone you have had to say good-bye to when they died.

Initially, the shocked disciples think they are seeing a ghost. I probably would have thought the same. Regardless of whether you believe in ghosts or not, a ghost is a disembodied presence of a person who has died and is still considered dead. (My grade four French teacher still haunts me to this day!). It's not the only time a ghost is referred to. Remember the story of the storm at sea? The disciples fear they are going to drown in the Sea of Galilee, and to make things worse, a ghost appears. Jesus assures them that they have nothing to fear and tells them, "It is I." He does something a ghost cannot do—he takes away our fear and reassures us of his presence.

Jesus is not a disembodied presence who comes back to haunt us. While resurrected, he is very much embodied; he's still connected to you and me, in our embodied states. He still carries his wounds and still has hungers. He is the living one whose only desire is to revitalize us, to give us fullness of life. Jesus is recognized in the *breaking* of the bread, and not only in the bread itself. Where life is broken and shared, he is present. When you and I dare to touch the wounds of our brothers and sisters, when we dare to be peacemakers even for the shortest of time, Christ once again is made present.

The Risen Christ did not return to straighten out the disciples, to seek an apology from them, nor did he simply come to open up our minds to understand the Scriptures. He came to give himself. All he has ever wanted to do was to be bread for the world. From the time he was born and placed in a food trough, a manger, he wanted to be food for the world. All he ever wanted to do was to get in the

way of our mouths, so that he could enter us and so that we could grow strong on him.

Once you take the food in, you realize you are now food for others, and you have a mission. The power of God overwhelms you. Failure, shame, and guilt can no longer paralyze you. You hear the world say, "Have you anything here to eat?" and you say, "I do. Let me tell you about this Jesus and all the things he was about. I am a witness to these things."

Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. These two told the others, and they too experienced his presence. Now he come to us. It's the story within the story within our story. The Body of Christ is no ghost but the hunger of humanity, and we are empowered to satisfy that hunger.

*-Fr. Phil*