

Homily notes from Canon Philip Dyson
Sunday 18th April 2021 - 3rd Sunday of Easter

Readings (Year B): 1st: Acts 3:13-15. 17-19. Psalm 4. 2nd: 1 John 2:1-5. Gospel: Luke 24:35-48.

A feeling this week of a little more normality. Going about, the sheer amount of traffic again. And I've been able to visit some house bound with the Blessed Sacrament after months of lockdown.

A good reminder of what we heard in the gospel: recognition of Jesus in the Scriptures and the Breaking of the Bread, a very early title for the Eucharist, the Mass. The Word & the Sacrament.

Today we are still taken back to the evening of the first Easter Day. In his account of the Resurrection, St Luke shows how the disciples were gradually led from fear to wonder, from wonder to faith, from faith to joy, and from joy to service.

By evening time at least three people had seen the risen Lord, and their faith was secured. But there were still many who were left wondering, until Jesus appeared and stood in the midst of them, not as they first thought, as a spirit, a ghost, but as a living person, a body of flesh and bones, capable of doing what other people did, yet more, as he could come through locked doors, as we know.

The broken body which Joseph of Arimathea had taken down from the cross and laid in the tomb was now standing before them, trying to convince them that the Resurrection was no delusion or hallucination, but a fact. This story stresses that Jesus' resurrection body is real. The disciples touch him. The marks of the passion are visible in his hands and feet and side; he eats with them.

Some poet hymn writers capture this "and thou hast come victorious, with risen body glorious." (Percy Dearmer d.1936) And from the Requiem section of Eucharistic Prayer III speaking of us and our resurrected bodies 'when from the earth he will raise up in the flesh those who have died, and transform our lowly body after the pattern of his own glorious body.' That is also used in a 15th Century hymn

about heaven: ‘Lights abode, celestial Salem: v 4 speaking of us: “O how glorious and resplendent fragile body shalt thou be, when endued with so much beauty, full of health and strong and free, full of vigour, full of pleasure that shall last eternally.”

And as an aside verse 2 has ‘There forever and for ever Alleluia is outpoured.’ Alleluia, with the Sanctus, the song of heaven!

Once again, as on the walk to Emmaus, Jesus explained to the startled disciples that all that had happened to him was in fact no more than a study of the Scriptures would have foretold. He “opened their mind” that they might “understand the Scriptures. He helped them to understand things which they had known, made them see “that the Christ should suffer and rise again,”

So gradually, but convincingly, the plan of God was revealed. The whole drama of creation and temptation, sin and forgiveness, love and hate, death and life was unfolded to the disciples. They began to see themselves as caught up in the purpose of God. They are given their part to play in his scheme for the redemption of people who had deserted and betrayed him. Thus are the disciples brought finally from joy to service as they are commissioned to go out as witnesses for Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, or those gathered in fear and bewilderment in the Upper Room, we can often run away from the disappointments of our lives.

Luke wants to encourage us by showing that resurrection can happen on the way as long as we still keep talking about our shattered illusions. Then all at once we will understand the meaning of all that has happened to us. Our eyes will be opened.

We will know that we aren’t alone. The risen Christ walks with us on our way. He breaks the bread for us. And is with us as he sends us out to proclaim him.

Luke indicates that Jesus' death and resurrection show there is nothing that God cannot use and change. There is no death that cannot be transformed into life: no darkness that cannot become bright: no fear that cannot become trust: no comfortlessness that cannot be comforted.

Death and resurrection tell us that everything can be transformed. Nothing can separate us from God. God is present everywhere, even in death, in the tomb, in solitude, in darkness, in despair.
For the Lord is risen, he is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Canon Philip Dyson