

*Welcome to our Eucharistic Celebration*

## **The Third Sunday of Easter**



*April 15, 2018*

*Saint Mary of the Assumption Parish*

### *Today's Themes in Scripture*

In the weeks between the Church's celebration of Easter and the Ascension, the Sunday readings are devoted to what happened to, and within, the community of believers immediately after the Resurrection. During his life, Jesus repeatedly explained his mission and purpose to those who followed him, but even his closest disciples did not understand him. In the weeks after Easter, the Gospels focus on the encounters between the Risen Jesus and his disciples, while the other readings reveal how utterly transformed those disciples were by these experiences. The preaching in Acts and the teachings in John's letters reveal how much the disciples have come to understand about Jesus' life and Resurrection. They have not only grasped their meaning, but have begun to boldly share it with others, urging people to turn their hearts to God and begin to live the new, transformed life that the Resurrection made possible.

In the first reading, Peter fearlessly preaches that Jesus was the Messiah, the one promised to the Patriarchs and foretold through the Prophets. Peter holds the people responsible for Jesus' death, but he does not condemn them. Instead, he offers a message of hope: they turn to God and repent, and their sins will be forgiven.

In his first letter, St. John urges believers to keep the commandments and not to sin. For John, the way we live is a sign that we know and love God. Not only that, but when we strive to keep God's word, God's love works in us to bring us to perfection. John also has a message of hope for believers, who while they are in the process of being perfected by God's love, are still human and still sin. When we sin, John says, Jesus is our Advocate to the Father. Though he was sinless, he understands our human nature and always stands with us before God.

When Jesus appears in today's gospel, the disciples from Emmaus are still giving their report! The disciples are fearful that Jesus is a ghost. Jesus shows them his glorified body: he can be touched, he looks the same; he can even eat! During this appearance, the disciples get a good look at the Risen Jesus, but they also are given a mission: they are to be Jesus' witnesses, and are to preach forgiveness of sins in his name.



### *Scripture Readings for Easter*

#### **Reading I: Acts 3:13-15, 17-19**

God raised Christ from the dead.

- In the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, Peter explains that Jesus is the fulfillment of the ancient messianic promises.
- Jesus, the Messiah, who died and was raised to new life, brought a new life of peace and right relationship with God.
- Through Jesus, God's merciful love is available to all those who seek it.

#### **Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 4: 2, 4-7, 7-8**

**Lord, let your face shine upon us.**

#### **Reading II: 1 John 2:1-5**

Whoever keeps God's word has love made perfect.

- The first part of the second reading reminds believers that sin still exists in the world.
- Believers must walk in light because God is light.
- Christ, who lives in a totally loving relationship with the Father, is also the Advocate who pleads our cause with the Father.

#### **Gospel: Luke 24:35-48**

He stood in their midst.

- The author of today's Gospel attempts to tell us that Jesus' resurrection involves the whole person, body and spirit.
- After his resurrection, when Jesus eats with the disciples, they recognize him in the breaking of bread.
- Life in Christ is a life of forgiveness and peace.

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# Through Confusion to Faith

The most important detail in Luke's accounts of the disciples meeting the risen Jesus may be the fact that he slowly opened their minds to understand what they had previously been unwilling or unable to grasp. Their facile and self-interested ideas about Jesus as Lord or Messiah all fell apart with the Passion. Those of us born into a so-called Christian society may unwittingly share their lack of depth of understanding. We sometimes proclaim: "He was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day" with about the same amount of wonder as we say "the light just turned green." When we read the Gospels, it is all too easy to overlook the mind-boggling confusion they convey and thus avoid their invitation to undergo the transformation they offer. To the extent that we succeed in those evasions, we prevent ourselves from sharing the faith experience of an encounter with Christ that the evangelists wanted to communicate.

Sometimes we enter into the stories we hear from Scripture as if they were played out with all the serious solemnity of a papal funeral. That approach can both shroud the fact that people genuinely enjoyed being with Jesus and erase the impact of his great sense of humor. Jesus was well-known for his proficiency as the come-back artist. His great one-liners included challenging the righteous that they'd better remove the 2-by-4 from their eyes before going after a speck in someone else's, as well as challenging the Pharisees with the observation that while straining to avoid ingesting a gnat they were swallowing a camel (Luke 6:42, Matthew 23:24). He never let his followers take themselves too seriously.

Remembering what the earthly Jesus was really like, it seems at least remotely possible that when Jesus suddenly materialized in the midst of his disciples on the night of his resurrection, he might have been at least tempted to startle them with a resounding "Boo!"

Luke quotes Jesus as saying "Peace be with you," but that greeting apparently had exactly the same effect as if he had plotted and carried off a plan to make them jump right out of their sandals. Luke says the disciples were "startled and terrified." That sounds like a progression from bad to worse. When their good sense kicked in, they figured that they were seeing a phantom. (So much for giving your friends a wonderful surprise ...)

When we read the Resurrection accounts without supplementary overlays of piety and unquestioned faith, we can start to comprehend how hard it was for the disciples to understand the risen Christ. That is simply because the Resurrection fulfilled everything Jesus had tried to teach them during his ministry but they had never grasped it. They had loved him, but their faith was never more than a ghost of his own. The risen Jesus had to begin by convincing them that he himself had returned to them and that he was truly alive; they could see the scars of his suffering and just as he had done throughout their life together, he could eat with them.

Luke tells us that Jesus nudged his friends through their incredulity and amazement to the point that he could open their minds to understand the Scriptures. The Gospels attest to the fact that until they had been through Jesus' death and resurrection, they did not and perhaps could not understand what he had tried to teach them. It was one thing to hear him proclaim that the last would be first; it was quite another for them to meet their crucified friend arisen from the dead. They had often heard him preach metanoia and forgiveness, but they began to learn what it meant when he transformed their way of thinking by returning to them with his message of peace. In the end, Jesus mandated his disciples to be his witnesses. He knew that the only way they could learn what his message was about was through preaching it in word and deed.

Thus, in today's reading from Acts, we meet the new Peter. No longer the braggart, he is a witness. As a prophet, he demands that his people accept their responsibility for crucifying Jesus. As an evangelist, he has become a preacher and agent of forgiveness, even ready to risk his skin for the message that has captivated him. On one hand, people might not recognize him; on another, they would say he had become what he was always meant to be.

In the end, Easter is God's invitation that we all become what we are meant to be in and through the encounter with the risen Christ. All the saints will tell us that the process involves terrible confusion and frightening realizations that prod us beyond our safe boundaries and easy creeds. They will also tell us that the peace we will find is worth any cost.