

3rd Sunday of Easter. 18 April, 2010

Acts 9:1-6; Ps 30; Rev 5:6-14; Jn 21: 1-19

As we enter the third week of Easter we may be finding it difficult to maintain the Easter focus that Jesus Christ is Risen from the dead. We have lots of liturgical reminders of the Resurrection - gold vestments, the paschal candle in pride of place, the greeting that Jesus Christ is risen indeed, abundant flowers, joyful music and the ritual sprinkling with holy water to remind us that as we live in union with a Risen Lord, we share in his victory, that we need let nothing defeat us and that nothing can prevent the spread of God's Kingdom of justice and peace in God's world.

But we will eventually come to the end of the Easter season and as Dorothy pointed out on Easter Day we so easily forget the centrality of the Resurrection and the creative presence of Christ in our everyday lives. In last Sunday's Gospel the disciples twice encountered the Risen Lord. This time they failed to recognise him when he stood on the shores of the Sea of Galilee - as if they had already forgotten he had Risen, their minds half-closed to the reality of his Resurrection. They had even returned to the boats Jesus had called them from years before and were resuming the hum drum of daily life. Once they all came to realise the Lord's presence by the Lake, they were excited; Peter leaps in to the water and swims to shore and the others follow. And soon they are all back together in the company of Jesus who asks Peter over and over whether he loves him and that, if he does, then he is to continue his work in the world.

How quickly the disciples had forgotten the Resurrection. How quickly we forget that Jesus lives, that in the words of the Easter hymn "now no more can death appal us, now no more can the grave enthral us" that "neither life nor death nor powers of hell can tear us from his keeping - ever!" And as we live in the presence of the Risen Lord, that reality should revolutionise the way we understand our selves and the world, give us sure ground for hope, and influence the decisions we make about everything because in the light of Christ's Easter victory, renewal and transformation are always possible for ourselves and this world.

Jesus taught the Kingdom, God's will for the world and for ourselves, that there is another way from the way of selfishness and greed, poverty, violence and injustice. And his miracles demonstrate the possibility of this other way, that where people are hungry they might be fed, where they are blind they might see, where they are lame they might walk where they are cowed by guilt they might be forgiven and freed, where they are dying, they might live. George McDonald, a Scottish theologian used to say about the miracles that God demonstrates quickly, in an instant, what is actually possible for nature and science to accomplish over a long period of time. There is, therefore, nothing far fetched, nothing supernatural, nothing unreal about the possibility of the Kingdom of Heaven, God's way for ourselves and the world. We pray that God's Kingdom will come, that his will be done on earth as it is in heaven; and Jesus calls us - as he calls Paul and Peter in today's readings, to follow him, and - as the Easter Blessing proclaims - to allow his creative power to work in us that which is pleasing in his sight.

Proclaiming the Resurrection year after year as we do can give the impression that we should notice linear progress in human life, that we who believe in Christ's work should be getting progressively better, when clearly we don't see any visible sign of it, just as some believe our world is getting increasingly better. While acknowledging the great strides human beings have made, especially in science and technology over the centuries, is there any sign that we are qualitatively better people or even better off than let's say the ancient Greeks, or that life is any happier? In fact we know that every new advancement brings with it problems of its own such as the damage done to the environment caused by advances in technology.

What the Cross and the Resurrection speak of, however, is not of linear progress but that Death and Resurrection must be faced by each generation as each generation is confronted by different challenges. And that death and resurrection is to be faced by each one of us in our daily lives, as upon waking every day we are beset by old habits or new situations that would be better to die and a new way be born in us and in our relationships. By faith in the Risen Christ who can make all things new, in union with him, we can be assured that change and renewal is possible. Martin Luther reputedly rose every day stretching his arms and thanking God that he was baptised - that his sins were forgiven and he could start afresh.

Resurrection is not simply a past event, nor simply a future promise, nor just the focus of one season in the Church's year. Resurrection is for us a daily reality; and living in union with the Risen Lord can give us courage and strength to rise again in our daily tasks and relationships. The risen Lord is a reality to the disciples whose presence and advice causes them to turn their fortunes around and catch a whopping quantity of fish! So let us prolong this season of Easter throughout our lives, let the reality of the Risen Christ reshape the way we understand the world and ourselves, assure us that there is always another way possible. "Believing in Resurrection is refusing to accept the world as it is, but that the world can be changed, and that it can be transfigured." For Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Alleluia.

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