

April 14, 2024 – Third Sunday of Easter
Witnessing to the Risen Lord by Our Personal Transformations in Our Lifestyles
Gospel of Luke 24:35-48
Fr. Oliver

The readings of today remind us that the purpose of the suffering, death, and Resurrection of Jesus was to save us from our sins. The first reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, gives us Peter's second sermon addressing the Jewish assembly at the Portico of Solomon in Jerusalem. Peter forcefully shows how the messianic prophecies have been fulfilled in the crucified and risen Jesus and challenges the Jews to repent and turn toward God so that their sins may be wiped away.

In the second reading, John answers doubts raised by the heretics of his time, asserting the fundamental Christian doctrine that Jesus' death was a sacrifice offered as expiation for our sins.

Today's Gospel describes Jesus' appearance on the evening of His Resurrection to his apostles who were in the locked Upper Room, the Cenacle. We see Jesus remove the doubts of his apostles about his Resurrection by inviting them to touch him and by eating a piece of cooked fish. Jesus explains how the prophecies have been fulfilled in him. Then he commissions them to bear witness to him and preach "*repentance and forgiveness of sins in his name*" after receiving the Holy Spirit.

There is a true story in Ripley's *Believe It or Not* about a judge in Yugoslavia who had an unfortunate accident. He was "electrocuted" when he reached up to turn on the light while standing in the bathtub. His wife found his body sprawled on the bathroom floor. She called for help. Friends and neighbours, police – everyone showed up. He was pronounced dead and taken to the funeral home. The local radio picked up the story and broadcast it all over the air. In the middle of the night, the judge regained consciousness. When he realized where he was, he rushed over to alert the night watchman, who promptly ran off, terrified. The first thought of the judge was to phone his wife and reassure her, using the funeral home phone. But he got no further than, "Hello darling, it's me," when she screamed and fainted. He tried calling a couple of the neighbours, but they all thought it was some sort of a sick prank. He even went so far as to go to the homes of several friends, but they were all sure he was a ghost and slammed the door in his face. Finally, he was able to call a friend in the next town who hadn't heard of his death. This friend was able to convince his family and other friends that he really was alive. Today's Gospel tells us that Jesus had to convince the disciples that he wasn't a ghost. He had to dispel their doubts and their fears. He showed them his hands and his feet. He invited them to touch him and see that he was real.

The same Jesus who, in the Upper Room, prepared his disciples for their preaching and witnessing mission, is present with us in the Eucharistic celebration. He invites us to share in the "Liturgy of the Word" and in "The Liturgy of Eucharist." In the first part of the Mass, Jesus speaks to us through the "Word of God." In the second part, He becomes our spiritual food and drink. Thus, today's Gospel scene is repeated every Sunday on our parish altars. Like the early disciples, we come together to repent of our sins, express our thanks for the blessings we have received, listen to God's words, and offer ourselves to God on the altar along with our gifts of bread and wine. We also share in the spiritual food Jesus supplies, and we are sent to share his message with the entire world.

"Witnessing to Jesus" means testifying by our holy, loving lives that the power of the Risen Jesus has touched us and transformed us in the most remarkable way. Witnessing to Jesus also means letting Jesus speak through us to other people. The Church desperately needs dedicated witnesses: priests, deacons, Brothers, Sisters, parents, teachers, doctors, nurses, young folks – all of us. The essence of bearing witness is to testify by our lives that the power of the risen Jesus has touched and transformed us. In other words, Jesus is to speak to other people through us. In Calcutta, a dying woman with her head in the lap of St. Teresa of Calcutta (Mother Teresa), looked at her for a long time, and, in a feeble voice, asked: "Are you the God Jesus who loves the poor and the sick?"

The story is told of a politician who, after receiving the proofs of a picture, was very angry with the photographer. He stormed back to the man's studio and screamed at him: "This picture does not do me justice!" The photographer replied, "Sir, with a face like yours, what you need is mercy, not justice!"

Jesus wants us to be a community which shares and in which everything is shared; a community which knows how to recognize Jesus in the poor, the marginalized, and the sick; a community that brings healing into people's lives; and a community of peacemakers and not makers of division or conflict. Just as the disciples experienced their risen Lord in their community, let us learn to recognize the presence of Jesus in our own homes, social service centres, nursing facilities, workplaces, hospitals, and schools. These are also the places where we have the opportunity to convey our peace and joy to others.