

## Third Sunday of Easter – Year A

Today's readings give us some idea of the impact of Christ's resurrection on the first of his followers. What is immediately obvious is the question of, 'Where do we go from here?' And it becomes clear that commitment to the risen Lord has consequences. It means we have to align our values with his, and focus on what it takes to follow his teachings

**Acts 2:14, 22-33** This is the first of four speeches Peter made to his fellow Jews. In each of them Luke is interpreting for his readers the meaning of the person and mission of Jesus, the Pentecost event and the call to spread the word of Jesus – the gospel. Peter draws attention to Jesus' humanity and his Galilean upbringing and situates him in the company of the prophets on account of his deeds of power. In fact, Peter infers that even some of his listeners could bear witness to the healings of mind and body that Jesus performed. Like the biblical prophets Jesus was divinely chosen to guide people back to God. Peter then presses the charge, accusing his listeners of being complicit in the torture and crucifixion of this prophet.

Peter shouts out the good news that God raised Jesus from the dead, thereby endorsing everything that Jesus had said and done. Peter uses the poetry of King David to refer to Jesus' journey (2 Samuel 22:6; Psalms 16 & 17) and his vindication by the Father, thereby driving home the fact that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Hebrew Scriptures.

To strengthen his point, Peter argues that David had not risen from the dead as his tomb is in Jerusalem for all to see. So, when David spoke of God ensuring that the 'holy one' would not experience corruption, he must have been referring to Christ (Psalm 132:11ff.). Peter is simply showing his Jewish audience that everything fits. It is all part of the divine plan and it has all been brought about by the outpouring of the Spirit. What's more, Peter and the disciples with him have borne witness to the risen Jesus.

**Psalms 16** The poet here rejoices in his religious conversion. He marvels at the fact that he is loved, and for him this is enough. Not even death can separate him from the divine lover. Peter quoted from this psalm on the day of Pentecost.

While there was no explicit theology of immortality in ancient Hebrew religion there were some poets who wrote of 'infinite' love and 'eternal delights' (v.11) in God's presence.

**1 Peter 1:17-21** This letter is one of the best written and most convincing letters in the New Testament. It is difficult to date, but modern scholars believe it was written in the last quarter of the first century by a disciple of Peter who belonged to a Petrine circle. This writer was clearly steeped in Peter's spirituality. We can be sure it reflects accurately the mind and theology of Peter.

The letter was addressing Christian communities in Asia Minor (modern Türkiye) and its purpose was to urge them to remain faithful in their commitment to Christ. In view of the transformation that was brought about by Christ's death and resurrection, Christians have been rescued from the aimless way of life handed down to them from their ancestors. In Peter's mind, a life without Christ and without living in conscious recognition of God as a loving Father is pointless and futile. In other words, what a privileged position we are in through our commitment to Jesus Christ! This is an enduring source of hope.

What is being affirmed here is that God is the Holy One who will judge all humankind and, in particular for Christians, God is our loving Father, the One who has called us. What we owe in return is reverence, which is commonly called 'the fear of the Lord' in the Hebrew Scriptures. This reverence becomes real in the response we make to our calling and our new birth in Christ.

### Little acts of generosity can create great habits of connection

How do we become resurrection people? It really comes down to how we nourish our relationships and that nourishing expresses itself in the love we give away. We fly the flag of Christ, indicating that we are one of his, when we reach out in loving connection with one another. It's no great effort to stop and be mindful of appreciating the one we are speaking with or listening to or just being with. Little acts of generosity can create great habits of connection.

**Luke 24:13-35** We are all familiar with the Emmaus story, but let's read it like a contemplative. We are first hit with the two disciples leaving Jerusalem. They are in confusion and are walking away from hope and assurance, and yet are wrestling with what had happened to Jesus. Then Jesus joins them walking along the road and their state of bewilderment prevents them from recognising him. Do we stop and think how periods of doubt, discouragement or loneliness can be moments of encounter? What does it take to focus on those words, 'I will never forsake you my people. I have carved you on the palm of my hand'?

### **I can control how I react to disappointment and frustration**

The disciples express the hope they had in Jesus, the great prophet, but it all seems to have fizzled out. What happens when things don't work out the way we wanted or planned? Does the control freak in us kick in with 'rhubarbs' and expletives or are we able to look through the fog and see a workable alternative? Is my way the only way? Am I adaptable, flexible? It's worth reflecting that while I may not be able to control the outcome or the distress, I can control how I react to disappointment and frustration. Alternatively, do you think a good dummy-spit would solve the problem?

'Something prevented them from recognising him.' What's happening here? There is a process taking place; the cloud is clearing gradually. Very often spiritual insights unfold slowly. Experiences have to be gone though before the penny drops. Accepting what is, and moving with patience towards insight may well be called for. It's possible we can meet Christ without recognising him. Mindfulness can help us be ready for encounter.

At this point the risen Lord helped the two disciples re-read Scripture in light of their experience. They saw it was true that the life of Christ was a fulfilment of the promises of the Hebrew Scriptures and they were transformed. Of course, it makes sense now when we read and internalise Scripture in light of our lived experience. But it takes time and patience to absorb insights from Scripture.

It then becomes real when the disciples share a meal with Jesus. Our communal sharing of the Eucharist is definitely a moment of encounter, not just with Christ in the food and drink, but in the people present at that moment and in the readings from Scripture. We can emulate Christ's self-giving in the way we regard and serve others.. Notice how the invitation to join the meal creates connection. Hospitality in this episode creates space for spiritual sight and wonder.

### **The heart can know before the brain kicks in**

'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us?' This is a reflection of heart stirring, not intellectual activity. The heart can know before the brain kicks in. As I write this I am listening to a piece by Ennio Morricone. The music is pure art that reflects the divine. It has the power to transform. When we stop and gaze at a sunset or watch a bird singing in a tree or see ants busily going about their tasks we are encountering the divine. We owe it to potential encounter of this sort to take time to reflect and absorb the wonder.

'Then they told their story of what happened.' The spiritual encounter with Christ leads to action. It impels us to pass on our revelatory experience of the Lord. How do we do that? Surely in the way we nourish the relationships in our life; taking time to appreciate what we have; and in particular, not taking for granted the people who are part of our life's journey.

This passage in our gospel reading stresses the phenomenon of recognition and encounter. The disciples just had to tell the others that they had recognised their Lord in the most unexpected way. They weren't meditating or praying but they were ready, disposed to meet Christ in their act of hospitality. Lots to absorb from this story.



Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it. Hebrews 13:2.



'That's a really nice suit, Harry. It looks expensive. How much was it?'

'Two payments and a change of address.'