

Homily 14th April

Texts: Acts 3: 12-19, Luke 24: 36b-48



If you **are** anything like me you may really struggle with comprehending the gospel account of the risen Christ's resurrection appearances. A risen Christ who can come and go just like that; a risen Christ who can simply pass through locked doors, a risen Christ who even eats broiled fish. And perhaps most mysterious of all a risen Christ who is not always immediately recognisable as happened initially with Mary Magdalene and those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. What are we to make of all this with our twenty-first century eyes; our vastly expanded understanding of some of the minutiae of God's creation and just how it works. There seems little doubt to me that those appearances do not fit logically into anything we yet know but reading the gospel accounts of all those various encounters and hearing the ringing tones of Peter's testimony I for one am absolutely convinced that all those little individual vignettes of the risen Christ's appearances had to be, just had to be real. Those privileged disciples to whom he came knew, without a shadow of doubt, that they had been in his living presence and from that time on would resolutely testify to the reality of those encounters whatever the obstacles of outright, scathing disbelief and cruel, relentless persecution that were put in their way.

And reflecting on all this it occurred to me that what the risen Christ did in those various encounters was to give us an example to follow in His name. Let's start with the locked doors and see them as the locked doors of among other things of grief, of pain, of loneliness and desperation. How many of you have had that amazing experience of being locked in by fear filling emotions and someone, or even something you've read or heard has out of the blue appeared to push through those doors and brought you not just much needed companionship but above all hope? It has certainly happened to me, and such encounters have always provided the blessing I so desperately needed and the

comforting reassurance that I no longer had to face up to my fears alone. Also, I am increasingly aware that at times the Holy Spirit has forcefully directed me towards a locked door behind which was someone in real need. And here I would like to give one tiny example of what I mean. I had been meaning and meaning to visit a friend but for one often rather pathetic reason or another had failed to make it until one day I thought I absolutely **must** go only to discover my timing was surely of that Holy Spirit's direction as she had just learned of her best friend's diagnosis of multiple cancers. I had come through the locked door of her stunned shock and disabling grief and was simply there so she could pour out her fears and weep openly for her friend. I find such encounters part of the mystery and the wonder that is God's grace acting within me and I pray that all of you have known the same and can with confidence look back and recognise where you too have walked at precisely the right time through a locked door and through your presence revealed the reality of the risen Christ which I truly believe is in all of us.

And then we have the risen Christ's example of both accepting and sharing food once in that locked room and once on the shore of the Sea of Tiberias. And here it is easy to see the parallel that all of us both need to be fed and to feed. Sometimes it may well be with actual food but other times we need to either receive or give the food best described as the food of time; the food of time to comfort, the food of time to enable people to be listened to without interruption and with sympathetic understanding, and sometimes the food of time to provide sensible, disinterested and realistic advice. All these and more are needed but most important of all the most precious food of all is the food of love. Foods we **all** need at times both to give and to receive and it is in the making of time and the purposeful sharing that we find yet again the realisation of the presence of the risen Christ in our midst.

And then we have the example of the risen Christ unveiling the scripture to those two heartbroken travellers on the Emmaus Road. How well do we know the scriptures? How often do we seek to find a greater understanding in them of the purposes of God or are we content just to make do with the weekly sermon that someone else has researched and thought long and hard about as to how best to expound the day's readings. Sometimes I feel we should do far more to open up such sermons to discussion and to seek other people's ideas as to exactly what they mean and what is their relevance to us in helping every one of us to grow in faith. Can we discern God's guiding hand and his divine purposes for us from both Old and New Testaments remembering that when the risen Christ expounded the scriptures there was no New Testament. He was the fulfilment of the Old Testament and the initiator of the New. And for those who are drawn to seek to understand the scriptures more there is a wealth of material on-line including daily reflections on a passage of scripture and goodness

knows how many books one can read, and I promise they are certainly not all deep theological tomes. And of course, a Bible Study group is maybe the best way of all to in which to seek and find the enlightenment given to those Emmaus travellers.

And finally, we have the mystery of the risen Christ not always being immediately recognised and here I think what we are being asked to learn is to look at people with the eyes of God. Look as it were inside them not just at their outer appearance; not just at how we have labelled them perhaps as our next door neighbour, or the man or woman at the supermarket check- out; not even as simply an all too familiar member of the family but instead look at them with a new focus to discover that just like us they are a child of God. In the words of Michael Mayne, it is a 'seeing with the heart, a seeing in the light of the Holy Spirit' that we are called to do. And here it is the words of Gandhi that are so apt; 'If you don't find God in the very next person you meet, it is a waste of time looking for him further.'

I pray that in imitation of the risen Christ's appearances to his disciples we may all learn to walk through locked doors, to accept and to give food in the spirit of shared hospitality, to study and learn from the scriptures and most of all learn to see with the heart and in doing all of these truly find the risen Christ in our midst.

Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good. Yours are the hands through which he blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are his body. Christ has no body now on earth but yours.