

## GOSPEL

LUKE 24:35-48

The disciples told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised Jesus at the breaking of bread.

They were still talking about all this when Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!' In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said, 'Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts rising in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet; yes, it is I indeed. Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have.' And as he said this he showed them his hands and feet. Their joy was so great that they could not believe it, and they stood dumbfounded; so he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' And they offered him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes.

Then he told them, 'This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms, has to be fulfilled.' He then opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.'

## A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

At the centre of this Third Sunday of Easter there is the encounter with the Risen One experienced by his disciples, all together. This is evidenced especially by the Gospel which introduces us once again to the Upper Room, where Jesus manifests himself to the Apostles, addressing this greeting to them: "Peace to you". It is the greeting of the Risen Christ, who gives us peace: "Peace to you!". It is a matter of both inner peace and the peace that is established in interpersonal relationships. The episode recounted by Luke the Evangelist rests heavily on the realism of the Resurrection. Jesus is not a spirit. Indeed, it is not about an apparition of Jesus' spirit, but of his real presence with his risen body.

Jesus realizes that the Apostles are unsettled in seeing him, that they are bewildered because the reality of the Resurrection is inconceivable to them.

They believe they are seeing a spirit; but the Risen Jesus is not a spirit; he is a man with body and soul. This is why, in order to convince them, he says to them: "See my hands and my feet" — he shows them his wounds — "that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have". And since this did not seem enough to overcome the disciples' disbelief — the Gospel says something interesting: there was so much joy they had within that this joy prevented them from believing it: 'No, it cannot be! It cannot be so! So much joy is not possible!'. And Jesus, in order to convince them, asks them: "Have you anything here to eat?". They offer him some broiled fish; Jesus takes and eats it in front of them, in order to convince them.

Jesus' insistence on the reality of his Resurrection illuminates the Christian perspective of the body: the body is not an obstacle nor a prison of the soul. The body is created by God, and mankind is not complete if there is no union of body and soul. Jesus, who has triumphed over death and risen in body and soul, helps us to understand that we must have a positive idea of our body. It can become an occasion or instrument of sin, but sin is not provoked by the body, but rather by our moral weakness. The body is a wondrous gift from God, intended, in union with the soul, to express in fullness the image and likeness of Him. Therefore, we are called to have great respect and care for our body and that of others.

Any offense or wound or violence to the body of our neighbour is an affront to God the Creator! My thoughts go, in particular, to the children, the women, the elderly who are physically abused. In the flesh of these people we find the Body of Christ. Christ wounded, mocked, slandered, humiliated, scourged, crucified.... Jesus taught us love. A love that, in his Resurrection, is demonstrated to be more powerful than sin and death, and seeks to redeem all those who experience in their own body the slavery of our time.

In a world where too often self-importance prevails over the weakest and materialism stifles the spirit, today's Gospel passage calls us to be people capable of looking deeply, full of wonder and great joy at having encountered the Risen Lord. It calls us to be people who know how to welcome and appreciate the novelty of life that He sows in history, in order to direct it toward new heavens and the new land. May we be sustained in this journey by the Virgin Mary,

to whose maternal intercession we entrust ourselves with faith.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- The disciples discovered the truth of Jesus' resurrection through both encounter and also reading and praying with the scriptures. How have the scriptures opened up your mind and heart to the reality of Jesus' presence?
- During Lent we reflected greatly on our experiences of suffering. Like the disciples, how does your faith in the risen Jesus change your understanding of suffering and hope for new life which is experienced through the resurrection?
- How do you react to Pope Francis' reflection on the importance of the body and respecting the life of all people, especially the poorest and weakest in our community?

## PRAYER

*Spend some time in prayer with one another*

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.