

3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER, CYCLE B

Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19 + Psalm 14: 2, 4, 7-9 + 1 John 2: 1-5 + Luke 24: 35-48

Holy Spirit Catholic Church: April 19, 2015

It is perhaps surprising that repentance and forgiveness, acts we much more readily associate with Lent, figure so prominently in all three Scripture readings for this 3rd Sunday of Easter. What do repentance and forgiveness have to do with the Easter Season?

We cannot encounter the Risen Lord in the exact same way that those first disciples do, by “*looking*” and “*touching*” and “*seeing*.”

But the Lord Jesus gives us today another concrete way to come to belief in the new life of resurrection.

For repentance—changing the way we think about God-- and forgiveness are themselves encounters with the Risen Lord—an experience of our own resurrection. When we change our mind about how the Risen Lord is at work in our life, when we see that he is constantly offering us forgiveness and a fresh start, then we can rise up with him to new life today.

As the Risen Lord, through the power of his Spirit, opens our minds to understand the Scriptures, we see how God throughout salvation history offers the gift of forgiveness. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekkah, Jacob and Rachel, Moses and Miriam, David and Bathsheba---all experience his forgiveness.

We touch the Risen Lord today and experience his healing touch when we know we are forgiven, that we are given a new lease on life, that we can begin a new life today.

This is risen life---you are forgiven!! Forgiven!

The first followers of the Lord Jesus taste new life by the gift of his forgiveness. They experience his saving forgiveness and its results—unity with him—whenever they break bread with him.

In fact, in the breaking of bread, in the Eucharistic meal, these broken followers are made whole again, their wounds are healed, and peace washes over them like a river.

By our standards, the offenders, those first followers of Jesus, should have been the ones seeking him out and begging for forgiveness. But it is not that way in this story nor is it ever that way with God. The Risen Jesus seeks out those who have offended him, who have wounded him by their betrayal and unfaithfulness. He reaches out and passes through locked doors, stony hearts, and walls of guilt and fear to bring the peace of His saving forgiveness. So, for Peter and the rest, their experience of Risen Life is coupled with the gift of forgiveness from the Risen Lord.

That has been one of the messages of the Gospels from the past 2 Sundays. Both in John's Gospel from last Sunday and Luke's Gospel for this Sunday, the Risen Lord comes to his followers to forgive them and gift them with peace. This is how they know Jesus is alive---by knowing they are forgiven and thus being filled with his peace.

The forgiveness they receive from the Risen Lord is not just for what they did wrong. The forgiveness flowing from the wounds of the Risen Lord is much greater and has far-reaching effects. His forgiveness washes away shame and guilt and fear and regret, all of which initially prevent the disciples from recognizing the Risen Lord.

In and through the gift of the Risen Lord's forgiveness, these first followers of his not only touch him and are touched by him and know he is alive, but his Risen Life pours into them to make them whole. What had been broken—their relationship with the Lord Jesus—is now restored. Separated from him by their sin and by death, they are reunited with Him in Risen Life.

This is Risen Life—"You are FORGIVEN!" And the most regular and most powerful way they touch this life-giving forgiveness of the Risen Lord is in the breaking of bread, in the celebration of the Eucharist.

It is not enough to receive forgiveness—it must be shared. It is never enough to experience the new life of the resurrection—it must be witnessed to by sharing what has been received. This is our witness to the resurrection: **I FORGIVE YOU!** Like those first disciples, we are to witness to the Risen Lord living in us by the power of His Spirit through forgiving others.

Look at Peter, the forgiven one, preaching forgiveness.
Peter, transformed by the forgiveness offered him by the Risen Lord,
now tells others they are forgiven, and thus gives witness to the Risen Lord.

Peter takes seriously the command of the Risen Lord, "*As the Father has sent me, so I now send you*" and knows that he is now given the mission given unto Jesus. "*Whose sins you forgive are forgiven.*"
So he offers forgiveness to those who traded the life of a murderer for Christ, who put to death the author of life.

How can Peter do this? Because he knows the people acted out of ignorance--- they did not know what they were doing.

Peter's sermon on forgiveness flows right from the lips of Jesus on the cross:

"Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

Peter is not going to live in the past,
holding onto hatred against those who killed his friend and Lord.
He is not going to remain locked away in that "*safe*" room
called "*unforgiveness*" and remain chained to the past.
By offering forgiveness, by sharing forgiveness,
by forgiving as he has been forgiven, he lives in the shining present
of the new day of the resurrection and sprints into a future full of hope.

We forgiven ones, who encounter the Risen Lord here,
are commissioned to do the same as Peter.

When we understand and accept and rejoice in the saving forgiveness
of the Risen Lord, we are inspired to share that forgiveness.

Given the breath of new life, we breathe upon others this same life-giving, freeing Spirit.
It helps to remember that those who have hurt us have acted out of ignorance,
as we do when we hurt others. They do not know what they do.

And it may help, if we cannot summon the willpower to offer them forgiveness,
to let the prayer of Jesus pass from his suffering lips to ours: "*Father, forgive them.*"
I cannot forgive them at this point in time, but you can, Father of all.

Every act of forgiveness is a choice to enter more fully into the risen life
of the present moment with the Lord rather than live a dead life in the past.

For there is no future without forgiveness, only a dead-end reliving of the past.

We witness to the resurrection when we offer forgiveness, for we say that we are willing
to begin a new relationship with this person that we forgive.

It is not going to be the same---in Christ, it can change, it can be made new.

During the days leading up to today's 20th anniversary of the OKC bombing, we have heard many stories of courage and bravery and generosity.

One that needs to be told over and over again is the story of Bud Welch, forgiving Timothy McVeigh.

Bud's 23-year old daughter, Julie, was killed in the OKC bombing and Bud, like the other family members of the victims, wanted McVeigh to die, to be killed by the State.

But in a movement of grace he decided to visit McVeigh's father, and in that encounter, he realized that killing Timothy McVeigh would result in another parent losing a child. He came back from that encounter opposed to the death penalty and graced by the Risen Lord to forgive the man who had taken the life of his daughter.

Why does the Church teach that to miss the weekly Sunday celebration of the Eucharist is a serious sin?

Because it is in the breaking of the bread that we experience the saving gift of the Lord's forgiveness and are made whole.

Because we come to know him in this sacred meal, to touch him and be touched by him and thus be healed of the hurts that others have inflicted upon us.

As we drink of his blood, we are washed clean of the offspring of sin—shame and fear.

As we weekly experience the forgiveness of our sins in the Eucharist, we then have the strength to go forth and share that great gift with others.

Empowered by the Spirit of the Risen Lord, we are sent to make a fractured world whole again.

When we respond to hatred with love and to injury with pardon, He rises up in us.

Fr. Joseph A. Jacobi