

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

April 15, 2018

First Reading – Acts 3:13-15, 17-19

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 4

Second Reading – 1 John 2:1-5a

Gospel – Luke 24:35-48

My dear people of God:

On this third Sunday after Easter, the Church offers us a glimpse of the marvelous deeds that the Lord had done through His apostles in the first reading. This is the continuation of the miraculous healing of a cripple by the apostles Peter and John in chapter 3, verses 1 to 12 of the Acts of the Apostles. Let me immediately add here that the healing happened when the two apostles went to the Temple for the 3:00 PM prayer. And please remember that we are reading the life of the young church after Pentecost. Peter and John were filled with the Holy Spirit.

As Peter and John entered the temple, they met this crippled man begging for alms by the Beautiful Gate. Instead of giving him money (which they did not have), Peter offered him something much better. Peter said: *"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk," he takes the man's hand and raises him up"* (3:6-7).

The response is even more dramatic than expected. Not only does the congenital cripple stand and walk; he also jumps, goes into the temple precincts with Peter and John on his own two feet, and proceeds to leap about "praising God" (3:7-8).

Our reading begins on verse 13, with the temple audience's reaction to this extraordinary event. They rush together in amazement, converging on the healed man who, now in shock and awe himself, is huddled around Peter and John.

The spellbound crowd fixes its gaze, however, not on the restored man, but on the miracle-working apostles: Peter and John. Please know that in verse 4, it was Peter who gazed "intently" at the lame beggar.

In the present case, while the man's healing certainly marks an "attention-grabbing" manifestation of supernatural power, Peter insists that such attention be properly directed, meaning not toward him and John. The dynamic result included, among other things, *"many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles"* in Jesus' name. The same Divine Spirit that animated Jesus to do God's work of healing and liberation now lives within His followers, enabling them to carry on Jesus' mission.

Peter addresses the crowd: *"Why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?"* (3:12). In short, Peter was saying: "we are not the story headliners here: the real ACTOR HERE IS JESUS WHOM YOU DISOWNED".

So then, who is responsible for this miraculous deed? No one less than GOD. Peter makes clear, and follows up with expounding just who this God is:

(First): this is not some newly discovered deity or spiritual force. The venerable God of Israel--the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob--remains at work here, restoring God's people to wholeness (3:13).

It comes as no surprise, then, that in the temple area Peter gives God full credit for healing the lame man, just as the man himself did, leaping about and "praising God." Somewhat ironically, the same God who "blessed" Jacob (Israel) by dislocating his hip, causing him to limp thereafter (Genesis 32:24-31), now strengthens the feet and ankles of a lifelong paralytic.

(Second): Peter announces that the God of Israel is also the God of Jesus - God's "Servant/Child, who lived on earth in the closest possible union with God as **"the Holy and Righteous One"** and **"Author of life"** (Acts 3:13-15).

This cluster of notable names for Jesus, stressing His faithful service, just character, and life-giving power, magnifies His reprehensible rejection (in favor of a "murderer"-Barabbas) and crucifixion by hostile forces. Peter made a very stark contrast between the murderer Barabbas and "the Author of life", Jesus.

Brothers and sisters: We know that God cannot tolerate such a travesty of justice, and so God responds, not by punishing Jesus' killers, but by raising Him from the dead and these apostles were witnesses to this. God is the faithful God of Resurrection. He is the God of the Patriarchs, the God of the prophets, who announced God's purpose to redeem His suffering people through a suffering Messiah. He fulfilled His promise (3:18). On account of this saving action of God, from now on, everybody is invited to a life of conversion and repentance.

Let us take a look at the second reading:

John in his letter, tells us how blessed we are for having an Advocate with the Father; ONE who has undertaken, and is fully able, to plead on our behalf, we who need pardon and salvation in His Name. He is "Jesus," the Savior, and "Christ," the Messiah, the Anointed. He alone is "the Righteous One," who received His nature free from sin, and as our Surety perfectly obeyed the law of God, and so fulfilled all righteousness. All men, in every land, and through successive generations, are invited to come to God through this all-sufficient atonement, and by this new and living way. The Gospel, when rightly received, sets our hearts against all sin; at the same time it gives us sinners, blessed relief due to our wounded consciences.

This letter of John beautifully enumerates the following: (1) the atonement of Christ for help against sin; (2) the need to love our brethren; (3) the need to be cautious against the love of this world and against errors; (4) and the encouragement to stand fast in faith and holiness.

Now, let us go the Gospel:

This is the continuation of the story on the Road to Emmaus and how the two disciples recognized Jesus in the Breaking of the Bread. That story ends with the two men going to Jerusalem to report what had happened. But before they can do that, they hear the testimony of the eleven who say that Jesus had been raised and had appeared to Simon Peter.

Back in Jerusalem they share their experience of the risen Jesus with their comrades who have also heard that Jesus has appeared to Simon Peter. Suddenly Jesus Himself appears in their midst. The fact that He comes

suddenly, although the doors were locked, indicates that His presence is now of a different kind.

He wishes them peace. It is the ordinary Jewish greeting of ‘Shalom’ but one which has special meaning in this Easter context. Before His Passion Jesus had told His disciples, *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. Not as the world do I give it to you...”* (John 14:27). The peace of the Risen Jesus is a messianic blessing.

In spite of what they had heard, they are terrified and think they are seeing a ghost. *“What are you afraid of?”* Jesus asks them. He shows them His pierced hands and feet. The Greeks mocked at the idea of bodily resurrection but Luke emphasizes the physical reality of Christ’s risen body, that is, the wholeness of the person of the risen Jesus.

Jesus invites them to come and touch Him. Ghosts do not have flesh and bones. As He showed them the wounds in His hands and feet their fear turns to a mixture of joy and utter astonishment. Jesus had to ask them to give Him something to eat. Ghosts don’t eat and Jesus is no ghost, He is no disembodied soul.

Jesus then had to explain, as He did with the Emmaus disciples, how all that had happened to Him was fully in harmony with and the fulfilment of the Law, the prophets and psalms. Mentioning the three constituent parts of the Old Testament Jesus indicates that the Messiah was foretold through the whole of the Hebrew Scriptures.

And out of Christ’s suffering, death, and resurrection comes the mission to proclaim reconciliation with God through Jesus to the whole world. *“You are witnesses to this.”* It is their mission to carry on the establishment of the Kingdom throughout the world. Or, as it is put here, “that repentance, for the forgiveness of sin, would be preached in the Messiah’s name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem”.

The Kingdom is being realized when people go through that process of radical conversion and change of life (metanoia) which brings about a deep reconciliation of each one with God, with all those around them and with themselves, when all divisions fall away, when fear and hostility are replaced with a caring love for each other. If we have not yet done so, let us become part of that great enterprise today.

It is interesting to note that Jesus reminded His disciples that He already prophesied His resurrection during His earthly ministry. Then He placed in the greater context of the Scriptures: the Law, the prophets, and the psalms. The "Law and the prophets" were parts of the Hebrew Scriptures which the Pharisees revered. The "Law...and the psalms" were revered by the Sadducees as basis for Temple worship. By including the term "psalms" with the "Law and the prophets" (an unusual combination), Luke not only wanted to change the interpretation of Scripture through the words of Jesus, He wanted to validate the newly developing forms of Christian worship. This change was a radical shift from the way Jesus' early Jewish followers lived (a life dominated by regulations of the Pharisees and Sadducees). The new Christian communities among the Gentiles (to which Luke addressed his Gospel) had new needs, new insights, and new ways to live out the Christian message.

Today's Gospel invites us to think about the Mission of the Church (CCC 849-856). "All of you are witnesses to everything that has happened." As witnesses, the early disciples were charged to tell others what they saw. Not only did Jesus command them, the Spirit impelled them to preach to all nations as the Father desired. Hence the missionary activity of the early disciples, as it is now in the Church, stemmed from the activity of the Trinity.

My dear people of God: As the three Divine persons in the Blessed Trinity (Father, Son, and Spirit) are now working in the world, they desire that we, the Church, lead all people into union with the Godhead. We are called to share what we have seen, heard, and touched with others. We, like the early Christians, are to witness to God's activity in His creation and among His people. The reward is great; it leads to the resurrection. Amen