

April 26, 2009

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## Third Sunday of Easter

### Reading 1

[Acts 3:13-15, 17-19](#)

Peter said to the people:  
"The God of Abraham,  
the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,  
the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus,  
whom you handed over and denied in Pilate's presence  
when he had decided to release him.  
You denied the Holy and Righteous One  
and asked that a murderer be released to you.  
The author of life you put to death,  
but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses.  
Now I know, brothers,  
that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did;  
but God has thus brought to fulfillment  
what he had announced beforehand  
through the mouth of all the prophets,  
that his Christ would suffer.  
Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away."

### Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9](#)

R. (7a) **Lord, let your face shine on us.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

When I call, answer me, O my just God,  
you who relieve me when I am in distress;  
have pity on me, and hear my prayer!

R. **Lord, let your face shine on us.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

Know that the LORD does wonders for his faithful one;  
the LORD will hear me when I call upon him.

R. **Lord, let your face shine on us.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

O LORD, let the light of your countenance shine upon us!  
You put gladness into my heart.

R. **Lord, let your face shine on us.**

or:

R. **Alleluia.**

As soon as I lie down, I fall peacefully asleep,  
for you alone, O LORD,

bring security to my dwelling.  
**R. Lord, let your face shine on us.**  
or:  
**R. Alleluia.**

## **Reading II**

[1 Jn 2:1-5a](#)

My children, I am writing this to you  
so that you may not commit sin.  
But if anyone does sin, we have an Advocate with the Father,  
Jesus Christ the righteous one.  
He is expiation for our sins,  
and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world.  
The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep  
his commandments.  
Those who say, "I know him," but do not keep his commandments  
are liars, and the truth is not in them.  
But whoever keeps his word,  
the love of God is truly perfected in him.

## **Gospel**

[Lk 24:35-48](#)

The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way,  
and how Jesus was made known to them  
in the breaking of bread.

While they were still speaking about this,  
he stood in their midst and said to them,  
"Peace be with you."  
But they were startled and terrified  
and thought that they were seeing a ghost.  
Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled?  
And why do questions arise in your hearts?  
Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.  
Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones  
as you can see I have."  
And as he said this,  
he showed them his hands and his feet.  
While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed,  
he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?"  
They gave him a piece of baked fish;  
he took it and ate it in front of them.

He said to them,  
"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you,  
that everything written about me in the law of Moses  
and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled."  
Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

And he said to them,  
"Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer  
and rise from the dead on the third day  
and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins,  
would be preached in his name  
to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.  
You are witnesses of these things."

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## HOMILY

Jesus wasn't your ordinary cult leader. His followers remained with Him. In Jesus' day there were many cult leaders: charismatic figures with a band of followers. But usually when the leader died, the cult disbanded. Not so with Jesus' disciples. If anything, the disciples became bolder after his death. Yes, they ran from the cross; they feared for their own lives; they lost all hope. But after Easter they went out and proclaimed that Jesus was the true messiah, the One sent by God. They preached that he was the Son of God, nailed to a cross and raised from the dead. Jesus' spirit animated his followers and formed them into a community. And then they go and do the very same things Jesus did: care for the needy, heal the sick, forgive the sinner. The apostles copied Jesus. (J. Siciliano, O.P. "First Impressions," April 26, 2009)

We read this story in the Acts of the Apostles. I would like to concentrate on this reading today. All during the Easter season – up until Pentecost (on May 31) – the first reading for Sunday will be from this book. So, for homework, you should read *The Acts of the Apostles*. (It's a short book with twenty-eight chapters. Read a chapter a day.) Two things about this book. First, it tells the story of the early church: how the first Christians – our ancestors – lived together, sharing what they owned, caring for one another; and spreading the good news throughout the known world.

The book begins with the Ascension: Jesus meets his disciples forty days after the resurrection. He promises to send the Holy Spirit upon them. Then, ten days later, on Pentecost, the Spirit does descend upon the disciples, inspiring and uniting them. The two main characters are Peter and Paul. Peter takes the message to the Jewish-Christians. Paul carries it further to the Gentiles, the non-Jewish people. And the Word spreads to the ends of the earth. Along the way they console the suffering and confront angry mobs. They are arrested, escape from jail, beaten up, even shipwrecked. The two of them see more adventures than Indiana Jones! They risk life and limb. Eventually both of them are executed. The two of them laid the foundation for the Church.

The second thing about the book is that it is written by St. Luke, who is also the author of the Gospel. So "The Acts" is a sequel to the Gospel. The Gospel focuses on Jesus: his teaching and work, and Luke leads a path to Jerusalem, where Jesus is arrested, crucified, and raised from death. The Acts focuses on the early church and the path leads away from Jerusalem. Luke and Acts are parallel stories; the apostles copy what Jesus did.

This is where we pick up the story today. Peter testifies that it is the God of the Jews – the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – who glorified Jesus. This scene follows a miraculous healing. You may remember how, one day, around three in the afternoon, ("the ninth hour," Acts 3:1-10), Peter and John were walking to the temple. They passed by a man who had been crippled all his life, begging in the street. The man asked them for spare change. Peter told him: "I have neither silver nor gold, but I give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ, walk!" Then Peter took him by the hand. The man could feel new strength filling his feet and ankles, his legs and his knees. The man leapt up, let go of Peter's hand, and walked into the temple, shouting praise to God. You can imagine that the people watching in the street were astonished. They crowded around Peter and John in awe. Their fame spread. Later Luke writes that some sick people would stand along the road hoping only that Peter's shadow would cross them and his power would heal them. They thought that Peter and John had magical power.

So today Peter explains to the crowd that he did not do this by his own power; it is the Spirit of Christ, received at Pentecost, that works through him. And that power of hearing works

for the sick as well as for the sinner. So Peter reminds them of their guilt in condemning Jesus, exchanging him for Barabbas, charging them: “You acted out of ignorance!” But Jesus doesn’t seek vengeance; he calls for conversion. Notice how Peter copies Jesus. First of all, he heals the crippled man, just as Jesus healed the hemorrhaging woman, the blind man, and so many others. Then Peter says that the crowd acted out of ignorance, reminding us of Jesus’ last words on the cross: “Father, forgive them, they do not know what they are doing.”

The stories in the Acts show us the apostles acting like Jesus: teaching, healing, forgiving. This is where we come in. We are writing a third book: the acts of the church today. We are the ones, like the apostles, who copy Jesus. Remember the word ‘apostle’ means ‘one who is sent.’ We are the ones being sent today. We are the ones who show that Jesus is the author of life, as Peter says. We are the ones who show that Jesus Christ is alive, really, and not just a ghost. We show this by sharing what we have – our time, our talent, our material goods – and by caring for one another.

Let me be specific. Here at St. Leo’s we are proud to have baptized one person at the Easter Vigil, confirmed three people and six received their First Communion. New members signal hope. The parishes all over the Oakland diocese can boast the same. In the United States, tens of thousands were received into the Catholic Church. A good sign. But let’s not be fooled by the numbers. We also know that there is a trend – that within two to three years many of these “neophytes” (new members) will lose interest and leave the church. It is not clear why, but it is clear that they do. A complaint is that, for the whole time in the RCIA, they are accompanied by the community, they enjoy strong support; then, after baptism, they feel pretty much left on their own. It seems to me that the Catholic Church does a very good job of preparing people for the sacraments: the RCIA prepares people well for adult baptism and confirmation; various versions of pre-Cana prepare couples for marriage; and our seminaries prepare young men for priesthood. We do a good job of preparing people for the sacraments. But we need work in maintaining these vocations, by accompanying our brothers and sisters along the way, strengthening them against the temptation that leads one to ask, “Is that all there is?” I know this: in my second year of ordination, I asked that same question, “Is this all there is to the life of a priest?” Disillusionment sets in at some point and we wonder if following this path of Christ was worth it. Is Jesus just a ghost?

Some of the disciples thought that Jesus was a ghost, while they were looking right at him, talking with him; they even touched his flesh and his wounds. Still, they wondered, is he a ghost? So Jesus asks for something to eat. “They gave him a piece of fish and he ate it in front of them.” Why does Luke specify this? Not because Jesus was hungry or because the disciples had a good catch that day, but because ghosts don’t eat. The sight of Jesus eating the fish helped prove to them that Jesus was alive and with them. This is the lesson for today. If you want to know that Jesus is alive and walking with you, feed him . . . feed him. Remember, as he says, “Whenever you feed the least of my brothers and sisters, you feed me” (cf. Matthew 25:40). This is why the RCIA team encourages the newly baptized to contribute their time and talent to the parish – as readers, servers, ministers of the Eucharist, or members of the parish or finance council. It is a way of “feeding others,” contributing to the community, and giving the parish a chance to still accompany them. Whenever we need to know that Christ is truly alive and near, we need to copy the apostles and feed somebody . . . to share what we have and care for someone. In this way we will be “witnesses” to the risen Lord. Amen.

*Thomas Scirghi, S.J.*