

3rd Sunday of Easter (B)
(Acts 3:13-15.17-19 / Luke 24:35-48)
15.04.2018
Body & Flesh

At the beginning of Jesus' story, we have this amazing statement from St John: "The Word became flesh" (Jn 1:14). We have a baby in a manger, human flesh in humility and vulnerability. Yet it is a body in which dwells the glory of God.

At the end of Jesus' story, again, we have a body, flesh wounded and humiliated. Here again it is a body radiant with the glory of God.

All this speaks to us of the importance of our body. Because from beginning to end, Christ fully and completely assumed our flesh, our body can become a temple for the glory of God.

Our body, what is flesh in us, is not an inconvenient baggage weighing us down until our soul can escape at death. We are not spirits trapped in bags of flesh. Our body is, as it was for Jesus, an important part of our identity as human beings, it is an essential aspect of our becoming human beings configured to Christ.

It would be strange to believe that while Christ needed a body in order to save us, we would have to get rid of our body in order to be saved. The body is God's gift to us in which we grow in our humanity and so become men and women fully alive. This explains why Christians should always show great respect for the human body.

Today in our Gospel reading, the Risen Lord has a body and uses it as a way to connect with the apostles. It is a body which is seen, touched and fed. Most of all, and this is a fact which is mentioned both in our first reading and in the Gospel, it is a body which suffered.

Like Jesus, we need a body in order to connect with the world and with one another. It is through our bodies that we enter in relationship with others.

The fact that in 2015, there were 15 million surgical cosmetic procedures performed in the United States and, in 2017, 28 thousand in the UK reveals clearly that the shape of our body matters to us and to others.

And here we come to the crux of the matter: our society does not know how to deal with the body in a respectful way, it is often objectified, and it is used either as a source for pleasure or for economic benefit. This difficulty to relate in a balanced way to our own body is deeply connected with the difficulty we have to relate to one another.

A society which does not help us to be at home in our own body cannot help people to be at peace with themselves and with each other. Christianity should be able to play a positive role in order to help people to dwell with themselves confidently. However, as Churches, we must let go of the old tune of guilt and shame we play over and over again and instead sing a new song in which we encourage one another to love and respect ourselves as we are.

There is at the moment a song which I suppose you know or at least have heard of. It is from the movie *The Greatest Showman*, and its title is *This is me*. The woman who sings it is a bearded woman and she is the spokesperson for all those men and women who, in the circus, are too small or too tall, too fat or too slim and who feel rejected. Allow me to quote her: "Hide away, they say / 'Cause we don't want your broken parts / I've learned to be

ashamed of all my scars / Run away, they say / No one'll love you as you are / But I won't let them break me down to dust / I know that there's a place for us / For we are glorious / (...) I am brave, I am bruised / I am who I'm meant to be, this is me."

These lyrics are not written from a Christian perspective, yet they are relevant to what Jesus says and does in our Gospel reading. The body of the Risen Lord is a wounded body, marked by scars. However in no way is it a source of shame or rejection for Jesus.

"Hide away, run away because we do not want your broken parts, no one will love you as we are"; today, explicitly or in a disguised way, these words are said to those whose body is too old, too disabled, too weak, those whose scars are too challenging, those whose body is not conformed to the criteria of physical beauty decreed by the media.

In showing his wounded body, Jesus Christ proclaims that we do not have to be ashamed of our woundedness, of our scars. Jesus reveals in his own body what his whole life has been about: we are loved no matter what, we are loved as we are, in the body that has been given to us and which has become by God's grace, his temple here on earth.

This morning we have many reasons to be thankful. The first one is that we are not alone, we are all members of the body of Christ, our personal body is part of the larger body of the Church. The body we formed together, like that of the Risen Lord in our Gospel, can be touched, seen, it needs to be fed and it suffers.

We give thanks because during this Eucharistic celebration we are going to receive the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ and this Sacrament is food for our journey. Moreover the fact that we commemorate Christ's death and Resurrection reminds us that our present sufferings find an echo in God's heart. We are reminded that, in Christ, our pains and aches do not have the last word.

During the Easter season as we give thanks for the Resurrection of the Lord, let us take care for our scars, let us be gentle with our wounds, let us respect our body and let us proclaim with faith our belief in its resurrection.