

3rd Sunday of Easter (C)  
(Acts 5:27-32.40-41 / John 21:1-19)  
The Resurrection of the Lord is a new creation  
05.05.2019

Dear brothers and sisters,

We believe that Jesus, who suffered his passion and died on the Cross, is risen from the dead. The Risen Lord is fully alive for ever. Jesus and the Risen Lord are one and the same person. But the Risen Lord is much more than the man Jesus who suffered and died. With the resurrection there is something unexpected, something new happens in Jesus and through Jesus in us. The proof of this is the fact that the disciples don't recognize the Risen Lord at first when He manifests himself to them. We read in today's gospel passage: "There stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus". They will recognize Him only when He will speak to them.

There is also something new which happens when the Risen Lord manifests himself to us today. Very often we don't recognize him, or at best we are surprised. There is something that we don't understand. To recognize and welcome the Risen Lord, we need not only to see him manifested, we also need to hear a word spoken by him.

In the narrative of the apparition of the Risen Lord on the shore of the sea of Tiberias just heard, Simon Peter and some other disciples decide to go fishing by night. These professional fishermen know that night time is the right moment to go fishing and make a good catch. At the end of the night the disciples come back having caught nothing. When it is light, the Risen Lord, who stands on the shore without being recognized as such, speaks to his disciples: "Have you caught anything, friends?" As they answer: "No", he says to them: "Throw the net out to starboard and you will find something". These experienced fishermen, exhausted after a fruitless night of work, listen to that order from a stranger probably with scepticism. Who is this man? Would He be Jesus who died and is risen? They are perplexed; their faith is caught in a kind of shadowy light. Even so, they obey him. Suddenly their nets were filled with big fish. They immediately recognize in the stranger on the shore the Lord Jesus who died. They see that He is now alive. They experience the power of the Risen Lord. To be able to recognize the Risen Christ, they needed to hear a word spoken by Him and to obey it. When the Risen Lord manifests himself, something new happens: on that morning it was a big catch of fish by day light...

Pope Saint John Paul the Second encapsulates the newness of this apparition of the Risen Lord with these words:

"After a long night of loneliness and toil the dawn arrives  
and the Risen Lord's appearance radically changes everything:  
the darkness is overcome by light,  
the fruitless work becomes an easy and abundant catch of fish,  
the feeling of tiredness and loneliness is transformed into joy and peace".

What is striking is that with the presence of the Risen Lord, light replaces darkness. It is not only the presence of the Risen Lord, but his presence and his word – both together – which bring light

into the darkness of our lives. The well-known verses of the psalmist come back to mind: “Your word is a lamp for my steps, and is light for my path” (Ps 118:105). If we allow the Risen Lord and his Word to enter our sentiments of depression and desolation, those areas of our lives marked by worries and trials, then His light will dispel our darkness. Eastertide is a moment when we are invited to allow the Word of the Risen Lord to challenge us so that we may experience something new, something beyond our ordinary expectation or capacity.

Let us take an example. During the Easter Season, the Word of God – the Word of the Risen Lord – invites us on several occasions “to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, to never repay one wrong with another... but instead to repay a wrong with a blessing”.

We can legitimately hesitate to do this. We can ask: How can I love and forgive someone who does not repent for the wrong he has done? Is this not a sign of weakness? Is it not a lack of respect for ourselves? Is it not simply unjust? These reactions miss the point. The way on which the Risen Lord invites us to walk is to refuse to be a prisoner of the wrong which was done to us. The Risen Christ invites the innocent victim to refuse to become a perpetrator in his turn, by rendering one wrong for another. The Risen Lord invites us to break the spiral of violence, to choose freely not to retaliate but instead to forgive. This is not an act of weakness. This is an act of freedom which requires a lot of courage. This way is a process, a long process, but a process which leads to life, a share in the life offered to us by the Risen Lord.

This path is the path followed by the Risen Christ himself at the end of today’s gospel passage. Peter had denied Jesus three times during his passion. No doubt Jesus was deeply hurt by Peter’s denial. No doubt Peter was also overburdened by a sense of guilt and shame. The text shows us that the Risen Lord chose not to remain a prisoner of his hurt and to set Peter free from his guilt and shame. He enters into a process of forgiveness which takes the form of a dialogue. To Peter who had denied him three times, the Risen Lord asks three times: “Peter, Do you love me?” And the Risen Lord does not stop there. At this point he confides a mission of trust to Peter: “Feed my sheep.” He confides to Peter the pastoral care of what is most precious to Him: his people. Is this not a powerful example of the newness brought about by the resurrection of Jesus?

The fruit of our obedience to the Word of the Risen Lord is food for the journey. The fish brought back by Peter and the disciples were used by Jesus to prepare a breakfast, Jesus said: “Bring some fish you have just caught... then, come and have breakfast”. Our obedience to the Word of the Risen Christ is the way to satisfy our legitimate hunger in a manner which will not disappoint us. Jesus said: “My food is to do the will of the one who sent me”.

During this Easter Season, may our love for the Word of God be rekindled! May we have at heart to listen to the Word of God and put it into practice! This is the way for us to meet the Risen Lord and to be deeply surprised and renewed by his presence.