

## Easter 2

We have been celebrating Easter for a week now. Each morning at Mass we have prayed the Gloria, which we do not ordinarily do on weekdays, and have listened to different Gospels, all of them stories of the risen Jesus' appearing to his disciples. They are marvelous stories. On Tuesday we read that long story from Luke's Gospel about the two disciples on the way to Emmaus who are joined by a stranger (it is Jesus but they do not recognize him), about their explaining to him the things that had recently happened in Jerusalem, about which he seems to be completely ignorant, and how they had hoped (we were hoping, they say) that he would be the one to redeem (free?) Israel. But he was killed, and now some of the women of their group had gone to the tomb and seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. And then the stranger begins to explain to them that the Scriptures teach that the messiah would have to suffer. And when it is evening and they are about to turn in, the stranger seems ready to continue his journey, but they beg him to turn in with them. And then the climax of the story: when they sat down to dinner and the stranger broke the bread for them, they recognized him. I suppose that Jesus had broken bread for them often. Hence they recognized him in this familiar gesture. But for us and the author of this story the point is

that we must recognize Jesus in the break he breaks for us, that is, in the Eucharist. Do we do so? Do we recognize the bread as Jesus present among us?

The stories about the risen Lord in John's Gospel are just as beautiful as Luke's and sometimes very similar in details. For instance, John has the story of Mary at the tomb looking for the missing body and saying to a stranger there whom she thinks to be the gardener: "Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you laid him, and I will take him." Then the gardener speaks her name and she recognizes him at once.

At times John seems to have the risen Lord give contradictory commands. For instance, in this scene Mary must have embraced Jesus after recognizing him, but Jesus then says to her: "Stop holding on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." A strange command! It is clear in itself, but what does it mean? That Mary must not try to reintroduce Jesus into his life as it was before his death, but must let him move on to his new life with the Father? Perhaps. But today's story from John is so different in that regard. Here the risen Lord invites the doubting Thomas to put his hand into the wound in his side and into the nail marks on his hands.

Yes, the stories of the appearance of the risen Jesus to his disciples given to us in the Gospels are indeed moving and touching. Though different in detail, they all want to teach us the same lesson: that Jesus is truly alive. Yes, he is transformed and therefore can go unrecognized at first by his disciples, but he is the same Jesus. The wounds are there to prove it. And it is the same Jesus in the sense that his words now are in line with what he taught them, namely, forgiveness and love for one another. When we meet someone who has hurt us, who has in some serious way betrayed us, we want to be avenged, we want to get even with that person, we want to hurt him or her as they have hurt us. But look at Jesus in today's story. Here he is meeting for the first time since this betrayal those who betrayed him. What does he say to them? How does he greet them? Peace, he says to them three times in our little story. Then he goes on to speak of forgiveness, at least for those who will accept it. Yes, this is the Jesus who forgave from the cross. This is the Jesus who taught his disciples to forgive seventy times seven, that is, indefinitely.

The end of this two-part story reveals its purpose. The disciples believe because they have seen and even touched the Lord. But now Jesus says: "Blessed are those who have not seen and have

believed.” That is of course every single Christian down through the centuries. Only the disciples have seen and touched; we, later generations, believe without seeing or touching. And yet can we not say that we see and touch him in the bread of the Eucharist and experience him both in the forgiveness that we receive from others and offer others?

We live in a violent world. We forget that we live in a world in which Russia and the United States have the capacity many times over to destroy our world. MAD, we call it. Mutually assured destruction. We live in a world of terrorists who think nothing of blowing people up, even doing it in God’s name. We live in a world where people are denied justice and basic human rights such as food, education and health care. Nevertheless we believe that God loves this world and has identified himself with it in Jesus of Nazareth, and that Jesus’ resurrection is a promise that our lives here, if they are lived in peace and forgiveness, will lead us to life beyond death. Yes, as we read at the end of today’s story, “. . . these things are written that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through this belief you may have life in his name.” Yes, may we believe ever more strongly and thereby become more and more alive both here and hereafter.