

## **Sermon from Thursday in Easter Week – April 25, 2019**

**Sister Monica Clare**

**Luke 24:36b-48**

Jesus stood among the disciples and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then 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, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

Today's reading happens in Luke's Gospel right after the events that took place on the road to Emmaus. This text begins with the two disciples who had encountered the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus, trying to explain to the other disciples in Jerusalem what had just happened to them. Now there were also other reports coming in from various eyewitnesses that Jesus had appeared to them as well - not in dreams, and not as a spirit, but in the flesh.

And then - in the midst of these two disciples trying to explain their experience, Jesus himself appears. The text doesn't say how he enters the room. It simply says "Jesus stood among them." And then they were startled and terrified and thought they were seeing a ghost. But Jesus calms them down and shows them that yes, it's really him appearing in the flesh, and he even eats a piece of fish to prove his humanity.

One of the many questions we can ask ourselves about this, and about the other post-resurrection appearances is – why does Jesus choose to appear to the disciples in this particular way, in the flesh? Why didn't he appear in glory in the sky, or ride in with an army of angels to overthrow the Roman Empire?

First of all, we know that God is constantly overturning our human expectations. He's not a God of nations and conquest and war. He's a God of connection and love.

Luke also tells us that Jesus appears here because he has an important message, and in delivering that message it's possible that Jesus wanted to appear in human form so that the disciples would know beyond a shadow of doubt that the message was really coming from him. He opens their minds to the scriptures and he tells them that other scriptures will be fulfilled and that they need

to wait to be clothed with power from on high so that, as he says here “repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

In addition to all that, though, what strikes me the most about Jesus appearing in the flesh is – I like to think it was also his way of showing the disciples the nature of his relationship with them, and his relationship with us now – it’s close, it’s intimate, it’s tangible. God is not up there in the sky, or in a little statue in a temple. He’s right next to us, with us, we can touch him. I think he’s saying “this is how close I am to you, always.” and certainly as Christians we all feel that closeness, that intimacy of Jesus when we take the time to notice that he is standing among us, and abiding within us.

By appearing in the flesh, Jesus also reminds us of how much he loves us. After the crucifixion, Jesus knew that many people, after a loved one has died, have a yearning in midst of our sadness to make sure that loved one is ok. I’ve heard people say that so many times “I just wish I could know he’s ok.” Jesus loved his disciples so much that as he delivered his urgent message to go out and proclaim the Gospel, he also yearned to comfort them, and to reassure them that he was ok, and more importantly that he would never leave them, and to this day he never has left us, his disciples. He comforted them in their time of fear and grief, just like he comforts us now.

And finally I think that the way that Jesus appears here is a reminder to us of God’s power. He shows us by appearing to the disciples after his human form had been so violently injured, that he is the most powerful force in all creation because he has, as they can now see and touch and hear, triumphed over death. And this is not just the kind of resurrection from the dead that we see elsewhere in the scriptures. This is different. Jesus doesn’t just come back from death and go back to living his regular life like Lazarus did. This is something else. In these post-resurrection appearances Jesus is fully human, fully divine.

He shows us that Jesus has been resurrected in a completely new way than the ones who were resurrected before him, and that the next chapters in the story of Jesus will turn out differently than any of us could ever expect. It’s a reminder that God has reiterated over and over to us in our darkest hours of grief and fear, when everything seems lost – I am right here with you and within you. I have a plan for you, and I will give you the inspiration and the strength to keep going.

And one final thought: When writing this homily I thought about a G.K. Chesterton quote that started circulating online after the fire at Notre Dame:

**“Christendom has had a series of revolutions and in each one of them Christianity has died. Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it had a God who knew the way out of the grave.”**