

THE RISEN CHRIST IS NEAR US. Homily for the third Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2020

Dear brothers and sisters, since the Easter vigil, the scriptural readings for the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours have been an assortment of clear evidences that our Lord had risen from the dead. For example, last Sunday's gospel recounted two appearances of the Risen Lord. The first in the evening of the day of the resurrection in which he gave us the Holy Spirit through the Apostles for the forgiveness of sins. St Thomas one of the was not present at this time. The second appearance was a week later when Thomas was present. Because Thomas doubted that the other Apostles had seen the Risen Lord, the Lord said to him, "Put your finger here and see my hands, bring your hands and put into my side and do not be unbelieving but believe" (John 20: 27). Thomas exclaimed with joy and conviction, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28), thereby declaring his belief in the resurrection and the divinity of Christ.

This Sunday, in the first reading, St Peter, one of the three who saw the empty tomb bore witness to the LORD'S resurrection saying,

Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs, which God worked through him in your midst, as you yourselves know. This man, delivered up by the plan and foreknowledge of God, you killed, using lawless men to crucify him. But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death, because it was impossible for him to be held by it (Acts 2:22-24).

In the gospel, the Risen Lord appeared to Cleopas and his companion, two disciples on the road to Emmaus. It was the evening of the first day of the week. Cleopas and his friend did not recognize the Risen Lord.<sup>1</sup> The Scripture says, "Their eyes were prevented from recognizing him" (Luke 24:14). As they walked along, Jesus opened the Scriptures to the disconsolate disciples who were mourning the death of the Lord and did not know what to make of the empty tomb. Their hearts and minds burned with understanding and consolation as they listened to Jesus explain from Moses and the prophets that it was necessary for the Messiah to undergo crucifixion and death before he could enter into his glory. Then came the climax; the nagging question - Where is the Christ now? This was answered in an unexpected way. From a sense of hospitality and openness to this unknown stranger who walked with them and, had explained, the Scriptures to them, they extended an invitation to the Lord without knowing that he was the Lord. *Mane Nobiscum* - "Stay with us" (Luke 24:31). Then came the moment of revelation - from the moment they sat down to eat supper, when the Lord took the bread, blessed, and broke and gave it to them, their eyes were opened. Where is the Risen Lord? He is here! He is in the holy Eucharist above all other forms of his presence in the world. The Holy Spirit is the One through whom the Lord Jesus becomes present in the Eucharist. HE IS THE REAL PRESENCE.

Dear brothers and sisters, first Jesus explained the Scriptures to the disciples. This is the liturgy of the word. Then he gave them, gave himself, in the Eucharist. This is the liturgy of the eucharist. These are the two parts of the Mass. The apostles recognized the Lord in the Eucharist because they had first opened their ears and

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<sup>1</sup> Just like Mary Magdalene who did not recognize the Lord when she saw her in the garden of Golgotha.

hearts to him as he explained the Scriptures to them. The Scriptures lead to Christ. Ignorance of the Scripture is ignorance of Christ and vice versa says, St Jerome.

In the Eucharist, we talk about the real Presence of Christ. The Lord himself said, “For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (John 6:55-56). St Justin Martyr wrote about this when he warned, “We do not consume the Eucharistic bread and wine as if it were ordinary food and drink, for we have been taught that as Jesus Christ our Savior became a man of flesh and blood by the power of the Word of God, so also the food that our flesh and blood assimilates for its nourishment becomes the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus by the power of his own words contained in the prayer of thanksgiving.”<sup>2</sup>

The Risen Lord is present in our neighbors and the strangers, - Remember his words, “Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren, you do unto me” (Matthew 25:40). He is present in the Scriptures, in the Old Testament and New Testament. When we read the Scriptures, it is Christ who is speaking to us.

Vatican Council II clearly detailed the modes of Christ's presence, “To accomplish so great a work, Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the

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<sup>2</sup> St Justin Martyr, The celebration of the Eucharist, From the First Apology in defense of the Christians by Justin, in the Office of the Readings, Sunday 3rd Week of Easter.

sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, "the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross," but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes ... He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20).<sup>3</sup>

In the same vein, "Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Christ Jesus is present in many ways to his Church...in the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, and in the sacraments of which he is the author."<sup>4</sup>

Above all He is present in the Holy Eucharist. According to St Thomas Aquinas, "The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as "the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend."<sup>5</sup>

"In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained."<sup>6</sup> This presence is called a real presence - which is not intended to exclude other types of presence as if

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<sup>3</sup> Vatican Council II, Sacrosanctum Concilium 7

<sup>4</sup> CCC 1373.

<sup>5</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, STh III,73,3c., CCC 1374

<sup>6</sup> Council of Trent (1551): DS 1651.

they could not be 'real' too. But because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.”<sup>7</sup>

Knowing that the Risen Lord is not far from us, St Peter the Apostle urges, "Conduct yourselves with reverence during the time of sojourning, realizing that you were ransomed from futile conduct, handed on by your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ as a spotless unblemished Lamb" (1 Peter 1:18-20). We must not let ourselves be tempted to place the presence of the Lord in the Holy Eucharist on the same par with other presences of Christ, as in the Easter candle, or sacramentals as this could lead to levity and disrespect.

Do we approach the Lord in the Blessed Eucharist with the utmost love and respect he deserves? This means not only cleanliness of the body but of the soul. What do we do when we are conscious of any sin in our souls before we receive him? Do we take time to adore him where he is reposed in the tabernacle? May we also never forget that just as the Risen Lord walked with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and he walks with us every day of our lives even when his presence is hidden from our eyes. He is near us.

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<sup>7</sup> CCC 1374