

HOMILY FOR APRIL 21-22, 2012
Third Sunday of Easter

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Today's readings invite us to continue our journey with the Risen Christ. In the Resurrection, Jesus, the Christ is no longer subject to the limitations of time and space. He rose to a type of life that we have never experienced but to which we look forward. Yes, the identity of Jesus remained the same, but he was raised into a new and different type of life than the one he lived before his death. The apostles, before Pentecost, had a great struggle with this. When the Christ appeared to them, he was no longer the same familiar Jesus with whom they had traveled the dusty roads of Palestine. On the other hand, he was still the same. That is the Mystery of it all. It is no wonder that the apostles were startled and terrified when he appeared to them and even thought he might be a ghost. Jesus showed them that although he was different he was the same, he had the scars of crucifixion, and he ate fish. I think there is not a more human activity than eating. So, why did the apostles need reassurance?

I can imagine that it was very difficult for them to let go of relating to Jesus in the ways they had been accustomed to. But if they were going to move on and spread the Gospel, they would have to. I think we can relate to this from our own experience of watching children grow up whether as parents or as friends. We must let go of relating to them as children or adolescents and learn to relate to them as adults. Similarly, but must more challenging, the apostles would have to learn to experience Jesus, not in his pre-resurrection physical body, but in and through the Spirit of Jesus living within each of them and perhaps more importantly among them. They would forever live in his presence but in his resurrected, transformed presence. And they would have to trust their experience of him.

If our faith is more than a looking back, then we experience the Resurrected Christ in the same manner as did they apostles. What Luke was trying to get across to his readers, and to us, is that with the Resurrection, everything changed, not in our relationship with Jesus, but in how we experienced that relationship. And how do we experience that relationship? Not face-to-face, but through the Spirit of Christ alive and vibrant in our universe. We experience Christ alive and vibrant in our brothers and sisters. We look into the eyes of those whom we love, and there we see and experience Christ because Christ is alive in every person. We look into the eyes of those whom we find difficult and whom we know find us difficult, and we experience Christ in the contradictions of that relationship. We experience the Spirit of Christ in God's revelation in other religions and cultures. But the Spirit of Christ is present to us, not only in other people, but in all of creation, the rocks that we know are in perpetual motion, the flowers, and the animals. God's outgoing Spirit energizes them – even the snakes. I had a student once, Priyadarshi, who was a native of India. I told him I would like to go to India and Nepal, but that I never would because of the cobras. He replied, Dr. Ring, the cobra is God's noble creature, also. And that is true. I will never forget Priyadarshi's response, and I have tried to incorporate it into my consciousness.

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What I am trying to say is that we are immersed in the holy because the Spirit of Christ permeates everything that is. What we are called to do, as the apostles were, is to recognize new ways in which divinity manifests itself. If, though, we have already decided what it means to experience Christ, then we will miss that experience every time the Spirit comes to us in ways that do not conform to our predetermined criteria. I think this is the struggle that the apostles faced.

We, as the apostles, are also asked to trust new ways of experiencing the Christ, and by extension, God. How do we know we are not just fooling ourselves? Well, we'll never know that in the same way that we know that

$2+2 = 4$. But there are signs for us, just as the apostles had signs. I draw these from Karl Rahner, and they certainly remind us that life with the Resurrected Christ takes place in the here and now, in the ordinary unfolding of life. Over the years, I have found this very reassuring, and I hope you do, also.

Rahner says that we know we are imbued with the Spirit of Christ, not particularly when we have a festive religious uplift, or any soft comfort. Rather, he asks, "Have we ever kept quiet, even though we wanted to defend ourselves when we had been unfairly treated? Have we ever sacrificed something without receiving any thanks or recognition for it, and even without a feeling of inner satisfaction? Have we ever decided on some course of action purely by the innermost judgment of our conscience, deep down where one can no longer tell or explain it to anyone, where one is quite alone and knows that one is taking a decision which no one else can take in one's place and for which one will have to answer for all eternity?" And he continues in this vein.

Are we willing to let go of our need to experience Christ only in the good times and realize that Christ is also with us in our confusion and darkness, but that the light will come. This seems to have been the post-Easter experience of the apostles. I suppose this means that our prayer should be to live in the moment, rejoicing in the felt presence of the Spirit, but not becoming anxious during the dark times. Even Jesus had his dark times.

And so, today, on the Third Sunday of Easter, when we also observe Earth Day, let us join with our brothers and sisters around the world as we celebrate God's presence in all of creation, in light, in darkness in one another, and on the World Earth Day, God's presence especially in the myriad forms of nature.