

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER (B)

Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19 Psalm 4 I John 2: 1-5a Luke 24: 35-48

By Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers”

Today’s Gospel is a continuation of the Emmaus story. I think I would resist the temptation to retell the previous account on the road to Emmaus. I don't think paraphrases of the scriptural accounts work well; people need to hear the story proclaimed, be present to it, hear all the narrative details. And they will, at another time. Instead, I would focus on this account, the one right after Emmaus. The same elements are present here as were present on the road: (1) non-recognition of the risen Christ (2) he scolds them (3) he gives them mind-opening instructions based on the Scriptures (4) they share a meal.

We can see Lucan touches in this story. The Hebrew Scriptures are central to Jesus' identity and to our mission. Eating together is important in Jesus' community, and it is at such a meal that we get what we need for our mission. The meal scenes have links to Eucharist and suggest such meals as places where we encounter the risen Lord. Notice the affirmation of his bodily presence. He is not just an "immortal spirit," but is found in flesh and blood. People were refuting the argument that Christ had really risen bodily and Luke is confronting their arguments. The emphasis on the bodily presence also refutes theories about matter being evil and thus should cause our attention to turn to his material presence in our world. Our religion is not just concerned with "spiritual matters," but involves the body and all that is material, concrete---the here and now. Luke places stress on witnessing to the risen Christ and all things that have to do with his life. As with earlier commands to preach, the message is about forgiveness. Preaching forgiveness of sins is a recurring theme in Luke. What is new is the mandate to give testimony to all peoples of Christ.

Things had not turned out the way the disciples had planned. They had hoped to sit in glory with him when he came into his earthly kingdom. With all his miracles and victorious confrontations against the religious authorities, with the crowds flocking to him, he looked like a winner to his followers. But they really weren't yet his "followers," for they had accommodated his message to fit their own dreams and expectations. So, here he is resurrected from the dead and now they need to start all over again. This time he has shocked them to attention by his presence, and they are overcome by their amazement and joy. Now they are more

attentive and can be called (as Luke called them in the opening line of this passage) "disciples." For that is what they are, they are listeners, learners, beginners. St. Francis used to say to his followers, "Let us begin again to serve the Lord God, for up to now we have done nothing." Even after doing so much for God, Francis must have seen that conversion-- turning again--- starting over, is always possible and indeed, necessary. It is never too late to start over again, for we too, like the disciples, have been guilty of abandoning our call--- our fidelity to the Lord and others.

Jesus eats with them; they are sharing a meal with him again and table unity is restored. At the Eucharist, Jesus offers them and us the opportunity to start over again. We can let go of our failures and disappointments; we can even stop clinging to our past successes--- let go.

God wants to open our minds to see new possibilities in our lives. And at this meal, he opens their minds to help them understand what had happened. After all this, instead of forming a nice cozy, comforted community, he sends them out to witness with a new clarity gotten from their encounter with him.

ONE GOOD PUBLICATION FOR THE PREACHER

THE LIVING PULPIT. April-June 2000, Volume 9, No. 2

This edition focuses on "Creation." This theme is approached from various aspects and includes theological and practical preaching insights related to the topic. In addition, there are book reviews, quotations and poetry. Helpful during this Jubilee year with more and more preachers becoming aware of the need to address creation in proclaiming the reign of God.

In general, I have found this excellent resource magazine for readings on topics that we frequently engage in our preaching, e.g. Lent, Advent, Sin, Justice, God, Jesus, Grace, Suffering, etc.

QUOTABLE: (This is a long one, but well worth it. Read on.)

Karl Rahner's 'Creation Spirituality':

Karl Rahner's appreciation of the divine goodness inherent in creation accounts for his optimistic attitude toward the salvation of the unbaptized of all ages. This includes, by extension, those whose spirituality is rooted, not in Christian Church affiliation, but in nature, human and earthly.

Rahner taught that God's grace is not held hostage until the waters of baptism are poured by priestly hands on a "sinful" human being. God loves and cares for God's children from the first moment of their existence. The same attitude prompted him to react in anger against "Massa diamante," Augustine's pessimistic denial of the possibility of salvation for the unbaptized pagan. Hence, Rahner asked Augustine rhetorically: "How can you believe in the victory of the cross of the eternal Son of God and at the same time see no problem in the fact that apparently enormous numbers of people are damned? Does this not testify to an indescribable coldness in your heart?"

Rahner refuses to look on human nature as stained and alienated from God. Instead, Rahner sees human nature as already caught up in God's beatific outreach to humankind even before the dawn of an awareness of what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ. For Rahner, God's grace is none other than the first moment of life.

At the heart of Rahner's creation spirituality lies his faith, not in a God who demands adherence to a "one, true Church," but in a God whose salvific benevolence extends over all of creation from the first dawn of this world. In a special way this same God creates those whose destiny is to live in the likeness of their Father creator and in the Spirit of the brother Jesus, whose name they may or may not be able to invoke. Grace for Rahner is all-pervasive because God is everywhere in creation.

Grace, as Rahner loved to say, is God personally present in us and manifest in the works that give glory to God's unending power and care.

----Geffrey B. Kelly, in LIVING PULPIT, page 25.

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Thank you. -

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