

3rd Sunday of Easter [B] 2024

(St. Michael, Monroe)

Every time we proclaim the Creed, we proclaim that we “look forward to the resurrection of the dead.” In the Apostles’ Creed we say “the resurrection of the body.” What exactly are we looking forward to?

In today’s Gospel, the disciples were wrestling with what was probably a common concern: is the resurrection a promise of some kind of ghost-life? Is it something somehow less-real than the life we are living here and now?

In this passage from Luke, Jesus seems to be saying “absolutely not!” to that question. He tells them to come and touch him; he eats a meal in their presence, showing them that his body is as real as theirs. Their heads were still spinning. The horrors of the crucifixion were still fresh in their minds—it had only been a few weeks ago. And yes, he was alive, they were almost certain of that. They had seen him several times. But it wasn’t like before, when they were with him 24/7. So in this scene he wants to assure them that he is real, that he is no ghost, that they aren’t hallucinating, that he is flesh and blood and bone.

The promise of the kingdom is one that includes an understanding that the **next life**, not this one, contains the fullness of the kingdom. We have **more** to look forward to, not less. Jesus is living a new life, but in a glorified body. We don’t know what such a body will look like, exactly, or how we are meant to exist in it.

What we **do** know is that “We believe in God who is the **creator** of flesh; we believe in the **Word made flesh** in order to redeem the flesh; we believe in the **resurrection of the flesh**, the fulfillment of both the creation and the redemption of the flesh.” That is from the Catechism (CCC: 1015).

In the Book of Genesis, God creates human beings, forming our bodies from the dust of the earth and breathing his very breath into us to give us life. God looks at us, body and soul, and declares that we are “very good.” Again and again in the Scriptures, we hear that Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God’s promises of salvation. And in this Gospel story, St. Luke highlights that Jesus will save us, body and soul. He has come to save our whole self.

This means that our body is not some kind of hindrance or burden that keeps us from Jesus’ promise. Especially as we age, and our body parts don’t work as well as they once did, with one ailment cropping up after another, we may think becoming a pure spirit with no body to contend with is a pretty inviting prospect. But that is not at all what Jesus is saying. Our souls, separated at death from our human body, will be reunited on the last day, and we will have a new life: immortal, incorruptible, every sense perfected. (Thomas Aquinas)

It was all pretty confusing to the disciples, at least until they were enlightened by the Spirit at Pentecost. They saw him in the Upper Room, and then he was gone; there he was on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and then he was gone. What were they to think? A body here and then not here?

We usually think of a human being as a body of flesh and blood and bone, with a soul or spirit, somewhere within that body, and I guess that is “reasonable.” But our reason is pretty limited. How about this: after we die, our body decomposes, while our spirit lives on. But at the end of time, at the “resurrection of the dead,” the body, if you will, our bodies will be reconstructed. And the soul, the spirit, will not only be **within** that body, but also on the **outside** as well, completely enveloping this flesh and blood (almost like an oreo!) Perhaps that new configuration is why the disciples sometimes had difficulty recognizing their Risen Lord.

So that is what we have to look forward to—not less, but **more**. But what are we to do until that great day arrives? The disciples had some questions about this Risen Lord, and they had lived with him for three years! What are **we** to think of him? How are we to act around him?

Well, Jesus is just as present to us as he was to them—certainly in this Eucharist. We recognize him in the breaking of the bread, as did they. But he is also in the flesh and blood and bone of one another. And just as Jesus asked the disciples for “something to eat,” he seeks in the cries and pleas of the poor and needy in our midst, “something to eat,” compassion and generosity from us.

To become witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection [“Witness” a term used over and over again by Peter and James and Paul in the Acts of the Apostles]... To become a witness is to recognize him in family and friends who offer their love to us and receive the love we yearn to give, but also in the poor who challenge us to imitate the compassion and servanthood of the Master, and even in the “enemy” who demeans or belittles us—the Risen Lord is present even there.

Each one of us here has received the Holy Spirit in Baptism; most of us have received the fullness of that Spirit, with his marvelous gifts, in Confirmation. Let us harness the power of that Spirit so that we will be able to recognize our Risen Lord, however he may reveal himself to us, and then truly be his witnesses in our troubled and fragile world until we join him at last with our own resurrected bodies in the fullness of the Kingdom.