

3rd Sunday Easter
April 18-19, 2015

“Why are you troubled?”

Readings: Acts 3:13-15, 17-19; 1 John 2:1-5; Luke 24: 35-48

It would be a stretch to say that I believed in ghosts, even as a little kid. I wasn't fascinated or intrigued by them, and yet I was probably a little afraid of the dark. I distinctly recall hearing about a house down on Summit Ave. that people said was haunted. It looked foreboding and eerie, and it reportedly made lots of sounds. Given that it was built in 1883, I guess we can forgive that.

Yet, in our Gospel today, Jesus clearly told his disciples not to be startled because a ghost does not have flesh and bones. And yet, how could they not have been startled? It was an impossible command, whether or not one believes in ghosts!

It is so easy for us to look back upon these early resurrection accounts and poke fun at them. After all, they spent three years with Jesus; they abandoned him in his hour of death; they lost all hope and then when he rose, they acted as if they had never seen him before. “What a bunch of fools,” we may think to ourselves! But it is not that simple, is it?

“Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? I would have loved to be a fly on the wall back then and observe the faces of the disciples. I wonder if perhaps they desired to reply with a sarcastic comment- “Why are we disturbed?” Is he joking?

Consider that some disciples had most likely just run seven miles back from Emmaus- I cannot imagine that they walked to explain the unbelievable events. They surely ran. And by now, one has to surmise that it was the middle of the night, for it was evening when they left Emmaus on foot.

Their hopes had vanished (or so they thought), and Jesus did not by the accounts look the same- he went through walls and closed doors- but other than that, why on earth were they disturbed?! Surely, the disciples heads were spinning. This hit them like a ton of bricks and they needed some time to sort things out. It is only fair for us to afford them the ability to respond as they did, and not too hastily characterize them as slow, dim-witted or stubborn.

But what about us- what about you and me? What is our excuse? Does Christianity disturb you? Does the mandate of the Gospel disturb you? Did you notice that according to the account, no one said a word? Not a single word is recorded as to their response- all we know is that someone handed him a piece of fish. What would you have said?

Some early Church writers supply what the text itself neglects. In the early second century, St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote: “And they immediately touched him, and believed, being mingled both with flesh and spirit.”¹ He provided them with a little cover, and being close enough, we’ll take him at his word. But I’ll be honest- sometimes I wonder if it might not in fact be more likely that they just stood there in utter silence and stared- afraid to move, hesitant to reach out.

Sometimes we are speechless, and sometimes it is most appropriate. Scott Hahn, the former Presbyterian minister who converted to the Catholic faith, currently is a theology professor and prolific author. Once, while reflecting on some of his reasons for his conversion, noted that he was overwhelmed by the profound silence at the time of the consecration when he once visited a Catholic Mass. He never forgot that, and returned again and again to Mass.

¹ St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans*, III

There is a reason for this silence at Mass, just as there was for the profound silence of the disciples as the light bulb went off in their heads as to the magnitude of Christ's resurrection.

The Catholic faith is disturbing precisely because of what is at stake. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, rose from the dead to save us from sin. As a result, He makes demands upon his followers. We are to take up our crosses and follow him. We cannot remain mere bystanders, even if for a little while, we stand in silence and awe.

We must go outside of ourselves, with confidence and joy, but with utter conviction that His life, death and resurrection has made all the difference in the world.

The realization that someone actually died and rose for you, on account of your sins, this is a feeling that cannot be described in words. So let us not cover over that silence- rather let us dwell within it, and be transformed by it.