

Homily - Third Sunday of Easter

“Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.”

One of the most crucial struggles of faith that we can go through is the question of whether we truly believe in God’s existence and his presence in our lives.

Depending on our backgrounds, we may come to that question from dramatically different perspectives.

Perhaps the most common is the way in which many of us have grown into that belief and awareness in a gradual and natural way from an early age.

In this atmosphere of faith, it becomes the backdrop of our life, something which is implicit as much as a chosen part of our worldview and daily practice.

But of course, there can be other paths.

For others, faith is something we arrive at later in life, after a difficult search for truth.

Or it may be that after falling away from that religious foundation of our childhood, we take ownership of our relationship with God in a new way after he calls us back to himself.

But regardless of how we arrive at that point, the question remains: do we believe that the Lord is present and working in our lives, and that he is who he says he is, our Savior and Redeemer, someone who loves us and desires to direct our entire destiny for this life and the next?

That is, to put it lightly, a big question.

And the answer is found in our experience of the mystery of the Resurrection.

This passage of Luke's Gospel that we have heard today takes place immediately following the famous encounter with the Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus.

The two disciples on that journey, as St. Gregory the Great would write in his commentary, were caught between love and doubt - hope in the news of the Resurrection, and doubt born from the suffering they had witnessed at the Crucifixion.

This tension should be familiar to us.

How many of us have struggled with crises of faith in the love of God when we found ourselves confronted with the realities of sin and suffering, or were overwhelmed by the other pressures of daily life?

Jesus doesn't abandon his friends in those moments of doubt.

Instead, he walks with them, even in a hidden way, to help lead them slowly to the fullness of truth, just as he has for so many of us in leading us back to the fullness of faith.

And now, in the breaking of the bread, he reveals himself to us.

It's striking that even then, the disciples still struggle to completely trust what they see in front of them.

The Lord both recognizes that doubt, and challenges it, beginning with those words of greeting: "Peace be with you."

But he continues, asking: "Why are you troubled?"

This is a beautiful passage to reflect on, especially when we are at a place in our lives where we are trying to reconcile our lives with the teachings of Christ and his Church.

He knows we are struggling, that our human nature and our doubts are pulling us in one direction and our faith in the other.

And yet, he doesn't condemn us outright; instead, he invites us to discover the reality of his love and the truth of who he is.

Often, when we realize that we are living a life that has led away from God, our first instinct is to think we should pull away, and not return to the Lord until we're sure we've figured things out one way or the other.

The truth is exactly the opposite.

There is no way to know the love of Jesus Christ from a safe distance.

The guidance we need and the enlightenment that we are looking for can only be found up close, on our knees, at the foot of his altar and in the mercy of the confessional.

The sacrifices of the Christian life and the truths of the Gospel only make sense when we are close enough to Jesus to touch him, to hear his words, and let him unfold the mysteries of our life as they entwine with his.

That's how it was for his apostles and closest friends.

Once they had begun to experience what Scripture calls the "incredulous joy" of the Resurrection, then Jesus began to unveil the truth of everything that came before.

With Christ standing there in front of them, the truths of Scripture were revealed, with all of prophecy and salvation history brought to fulfillment before their eyes.

This is the journey of revelation that Our Lord wants us to experience with him.

Far too often, we prefer to stay in that tension that the Church Fathers talked about - caught between faith and doubt, between hope and uncertainty.

It's easier that way. I know it is.

It's easier to just show up on Sunday, to give God an hour and hope that's enough, and carry on with the rest of our lives with little thought to how they fit into the divine plan, or the friendship that Christ wants to have with each of us.

It's easier not to carry our cross, and try to make something for ourselves that's a little bit lighter.

But that's not where we'll find truth, or clarity, or peace.

If you recognize yourself in this Gospel, I want to invite you to consider a simple challenge: Learn from Our Lord's friends.

Don't hold him at a distance; really invest that time to be with him, up close.

Spend time, real time, in his presence, with his Word, and receiving his sacraments, so that he can explain the mysteries of his love and providence in way that you'll understand.

Because he wants you to know that peace, and joy, and to be a witness to the reality of his Resurrection, like all the apostles who came before us.

Let's give him that chance.

Here, in this sacrament of the altar, we pray that this peace will come to rest in us, and that here in his presence, we will come to know the fullness of his love, and the joy of his Gospel.