

Homily 3rd Sunday of Easter Year B 2024

Paul Verlaine, a 19th C French poet, was imprisoned for shooting at a fellow poet. While he was in prison, he had something of a conversion. In one of his poems that he wrote there, he addresses the risen Lord, *'Lord... Beneath this troubled canopy where my heart has been digging out its tomb and where I feel the heavens flow towards me, I ask you, by what road you'd have me come'*. Later in the same poem, the Lord says to him, *'It is not you who must come to me; it is I who have chosen to come to you. Look at my hands stretched out to you. Here, eat; be nourished. Let your mind be opened to understand'*. Verlaine came to understand that, rather than having to find the right road to the Lord, the Lord was coming to him.

We are in the season of Easter which is seven weeks long. It gives us time to reflect more deeply on the various meanings of Easter. A major proclamation of Easter is the Lord's enduring faithfulness to us, in spite of our unfaithfulness to him. Because of our failures and weaknesses, we can wonder what road we need to take to come to the Lord from whom we have turned away. In response, the Lord says, *'it is not you who must come to me; it is I who have chosen to come to you'*. This kind of good news can be hard to believe, as the disciples showed in the gospel. Having failed to love the Lord in various ways we, too, can doubt that the Lord could love us in this all-forgiving, all-embracing way. Yet, this is one of the core messages of Easter. Easter invites us to open ourselves to the coming of the risen Lord who loves us in our weakness and frailty and empowers us to go forth renewed. To overcome the doubt of his disciples Jesus first showed them his wounds which revealed that great love in which he laid down his life for us all.

The Lord then opened the Scriptures for his disciples to help them to see that what had happened to him, including his passion and death, was already contained within the Jewish Scriptures. The risen Lord continues to speak to us today through the Scriptures, so it is important for us to spend time reflecting on the Easter readings each week. Jesus is present to us in his word, the word of the Lord.

Finally, the risen Lord shared a simple meal of fish with his disciples to convince them that he wanted to be in communion with them in spite of their failures. It also showed that he was real not an apparition or figment of the imagination. The Lord continues to call us to eat at his table, the eucharistic table. For it is above all at the table of the Eucharist that he enters into communion with us and invites us to enter into communion with him. It is in the Eucharist that we can really appreciate that the Lord has chosen to come to us in our brokenness and weakness. It is from the Eucharist that he sends us out filled with the power of his presence to be his witnesses in the world. He sends us out empowered by his Spirit as his witnesses into a world crying out for the love, goodness and mercy of Christ.

A small-town lawyer called his first witness to the stand in a trial, an 80-year-old woman. He approached her and asked, "Mrs. Smith, do you know me?"

She responded, *"Why, yes, I do know you Mr. Jones. I've known you since you were a young boy. And frankly, you've been a big disappointment to me. You lie, you cheat, you manipulate people and talk about them behind their backs. Yes, I know you."*

The lawyer was stunned. Not knowing what else to do he pointed across the room and asked, *"Mrs. Smith, do you know the defence lawyer?"*

She again replied, *"Why, yes I do. I've known Mr. Green since he was a youngster too. I used to baby-sit him for his parents. And he too, has been a real disappointment to me. He's lazy, bigoted, he has a drinking problem and his law practice is one of the shoddiest in the entire state. Yes, I know him."*

At this point, the judge called both lawyers to the bench. In a very quiet voice, he said with menace, *"If either of you asks her if she knows me, you'll be jailed for contempt!"*