

3rd Sunday of Eastertide (A)

30th April 2017

'From Desolation to Delight'

Acts 2: *"You killed Him, but God raised Him to life."* Ps 15: *You will not leave my soul amongst the dead.* 1Pt 1: *Through Him you now have faith in God, who raised Him from the dead.* Lk 24: 13–35: the road to Emmaus

Compare the mood of Cleopas and his companion in the Gospel passage with the mood of St Peter and the other apostles in the Acts of the Apostles reading! The first shows a despondency: the disciples downcast and not knowing where next to turn; drifting home to Emmaus with little seeming hope for the future. The second shows the apostles upbeat, outgoing, full of zeal and the eloquence of their clear and urgent mission. It's almost hard to imagine that these are both from the same group of Our Lord's followers, but they are ... just a few weeks apart. The Gospel event is from Easter Day, the very evening of Our Lord's resurrection, before the news of His rising has really filtered through; the Acts event is from Pentecost day, 7 weeks later, when the Apostles have received their powerful, spiritual, anointing from on high.

This enormous difference is made not by themselves ... not by anything they have done, not by their own efforts

or achievements, is it? The change from despondency to determination — from desolation to delight — has come about solely by the actions of God Himself: through the Easter event of the Resurrection of Jesus and the Pentecostal event of the Descent of the Holy Spirit. These are things that God brought about, not man, and which have a huge, tangible effect on Our Lord's followers. This helps us, even at the distance of 2000yrs to know that these were real events, historical happenings, because they led to such a dramatic change in the disciples. Nothing else can explain how downcast deserters became such animated missionaries. St Peter strenuously denied Our Lord three times at the very point when Jesus was on trial before selected members of the Sanhedrin; and yet now his address is a model of eloquence and of clarity about just who Jesus truly is: the one longed for in the psalms and by the prophets: this has been proven beyond doubt by His Resurrection and by the witness of the power of the Spirit.

In fact, probably the most convincing fact as we reflect on the Resurrection of Jesus is just what a huge

conversion the apostles underwent. From weak, ordinary, men — lacking understanding, often, and certainly lacking conviction — they become men who will mostly be martyrs. For this Good News they will, almost every one of them, lay down their lives; shed their blood for the truth of what they proclaim — this, surely, they could not have done without the absolute truth of having seen the Risen Jesus alive with their own eyes.

This testimony of the apostles is crucial for us. We profess in the Creed “one, holy, Catholic, *apostolic*” faith — that is, the faith given to us by the rigorous preaching of the apostles, backed up by the witness of their blood. Our faith is built on solid foundations, that is, the apostolic foundation stones of those who were taught directly by Jesus, whom He appeared to after Rising, and whom He commissioned to be His witnesses to the ends of the earth, recipients of the Spirit’s anointing with fire. We stand on solid ground! Our faith in Jesus’s Resurrection isn’t something fantastical or vaguely superstitious or make-believe. Real flesh-and-blood men, like ourselves, gave

their lives for it: they would not, because they *could* not, deny it: “God raised this man, Jesus, to life,” says Peter to the crowd, “and all of us are witnesses to that ... What you see and hear is the outpouring of [the] Spirit.”

In order to live our faith fully, we need to have this same real conviction about Our Lord’s Resurrection and His divinity. When we are filled with this truth, and filled with the power of the Spirit, we too are utterly changed. We can no longer live a mediocre life, a bland life lived as if God barely existed, banishing Him to the periphery of our lives. When we *really* believe — when we have actually understood the full meaning of the Resurrection and of Pentecost — then we will be changed: we will look and sound a lot more like St Peter on Pentecost Day than like Cleopas as he dragged himself to Emmaus: we will be full of joy and hope in the Spirit, not be fearful of life and the future. Don’t think that you cannot be changed! You can be. It’s not your work, it’s God’s work, but you must let Him. Pray to be changed; pray to be enlightened; pray to be on fire with love for Jesus, in an “outpouring of the Spirit.”