

3rd Sunday of Easter (B)

19th April 2015

'Recognised Him in the Breaking of Bread'

Acts 3: *the God of our ancestors ... has glorified His servant Jesus*

Ps 4: *Lift up the light of Your face on us, O Lord*

1Jn 2: *we can be sure that know God only be keeping His commandments*

Lk 24: 35–48: *Yes, it is I indeed. Touch me and see for yourselves.*

The 1st line of the Gospel recounts the testimony of the two disciples who had — to their great surprise — encountered the risen Jesus on their way home, from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Despite its being late, and a 7-mile walk, they hurried back to Jerusalem, to rendezvous again with the apostles. Their story is corroborated: “the Lord has truly risen, and has appeared to Simon,” they say; and then at that very moment, Jesus appears to them all, and shows them that He is truly risen in the flesh, in His human body.

But what I want to concentrate on today is that expression that the Emmaus disciples come out with: “they had recognised Jesus at the breaking of bread.” It was when the risen Lord — at table in their house — had re-enacted the actions and words of the Last Supper: he had taken the bread, broken it, and given it to them ... *This is My Body which will be given up for you.* And they recognised Him, but He had vanished from their sight. It is central to our resurrection faith — to our Catholic faith — that Jesus is with us, fully, and really

with us. Not a memory, not a distant memory of sometime long ago when Jesus walked the earth and said and did some good things. The real Christian faith is that Jesus is ‘with us always, yes, to the end of time.’ When He vanished from their sight, that evening, in Emmaus, it wasn’t because He was withdrawing from them — He was not — for He was in fact truly and really with them in the Blessed Sacrament that He had just celebrated with them. The most intimate way in which Jesus fulfils His promise to be with us always is in the Eucharist.

We speak, as Catholics, of the “real presence.” By this we mean that Jesus the Lord, the Son of God, is really present in His Body and Blood in the Eucharist. It is not some reminder, or some image or symbol: it is Jesus, truly Jesus, our Lord and God. And so this has profound consequences for the way we express our faith. It means that we have to behave in a way deeply reverent towards the Blessed Sacrament. What we bring up to the altar in the Offertory Procession, to the altar, halfway through Mass is, of course, bread and wine. The gifts offered by you, the people, are the bread and wine, along with your monetary offerings that keep the parish going: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, the bread and wine that Jesus used at the Last Supper, these are offered and placed on the altar. But

after the consecration, it is no longer bread and wine that is present. Once the words of Jesus have been prayed over them by the priest, it is the Body of the Lord, and His Precious Blood, that is now present. That is our belief; and that is the truth. It's not just true because I think or believe it's true: it's true because it is what happens, by the power of God Himself.

And so, this is why we **kneel** through the Eucharistic Prayer; it's why the **bells** are rung at the time of consecration, to remind us that the most sacred time of the whole Mass is here, calling us to profound prayer and reverence: the Lord is truly risen; the Lord is truly present on this altar. It means that we never **speak** of Holy Communion as 'bread and wine.' I have no hesitation at all if ever I hear someone speak of Communion as 'bread and wine' I correct them immediately then and there, and without apology: if we cannot get this right, then the very heart of our faith is wrong. The Eucharist *is* the Lord!

It means that we must reverently **genuflect** as we enter and leave the church. When we genuflect, we are acknowledging the real presence of Jesus in the Tabernacle; it is the Tabernacle we are genuflecting to: not the altar, not the crucifix, not any of the statues, but to Jesus, His real presence in the Tabernacle. And, most importantly, our faith determines

how we approach **Holy Communion**. (1) Because Communion is the living and holy presence of Jesus, we cannot receive Holy Communion if we are in a state of serious sin (if we've been deliberately missing Mass, for example — then seek Confession first (our faith is quite clear on this matter). (2) We must approach the Sacrament mindful of what we are doing, and prayerful with it. As we come up the aisle for Holy Communion, be deeply in prayer, ready to receive Jesus into your heart; humbly awaiting His coming into your soul, your Lord and God. (3) When you return to your place, you should kneel and pray: this is the moment in the week when you are closest to the risen Jesus: He is in your Heart, and it is a very precious moment, to adore Him, to pray for yourself and all your needs, to commend to Him your loved ones, and the needs of our parish, and your neighbour. Do not be distracted after Communion, and do not distract; do not chat or fiddle ... This moment of thanksgiving is a sacred time; keep quiet and still, and welcome the Lord with all the faith and love you can.

If we live and express our belief in the Real Presence properly, then Jesus will change our lives, and our whole parish too will be changed for the better. The Lord Has risen, and He is truly with us, *alleluia alleluia!*