

3 Easter – Year B – April 29, 2009 - Homily
Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48
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I brought an icon to share with you this evening. It's called 'The Holy Hospitality'. Like all icons, it is not designed or meant to be worshipped for itself. After all, it is just wood, paint and lacquer; made by human hands. As the first of the Ten Commandments tells us, the only right subject of our worship is God. Still icons can be an aid to prayer and worship of God. Most are designed as if the one looking at the icon is to be included into the scene or somehow welcomed into it. Many people think of icons as windows to the holy. Prayer is a window as well.

In tonight's Gospel reading from Luke, we return Luke's version of the first post-resurrection appearance of Jesus to the disciples. There is fear and shock at Jesus' sudden appearance. Jesus' words sound rather like an angel's as he says, "Peace be with you." Yet we quickly understand that this is more than an angelic vision, and much more than a ghostly apparition. Jesus immediately perceives the doubts in their hearts. Only one Who is fully divine can see into the depths of our hearts with such clarity, and with such grace. What a comfort to know that in our own resurrection to new and unending life, we will have a transformed, but familiar bodily form, that we will recognize our friends and family and that they will know us. This little passage of Luke also tells us that we will remember and know at least some of the things we learned and shared in this life. Our understanding will be robed in love beyond our wildest imaginations, and go deeper than we ever thought possible. And in this passage, we also learn that we will enjoy table fellowship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – a heavenly banquet fit for a King!

Jesus' solidity, his material resurrected form if you like, is an important reminder that God cares about our bodies, that most obvious signature of our humanity. And if God cares, you and I should care too. As the Body of Christ, together and individually, our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit – created to worship God, made to do the work God has given us to do. The apostle Paul, who was not amongst the first disciples to see the risen Lord, still has many words of wisdom for us about our bodies in this life. Here's a snapshot of Paul's advice about taking care of this bodily blessing from God. Our mortal bodies are prone to sinfulness, and in Christ we are called to embrace the transformation that begins with our faith and baptism through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the giver of all life both now and in our new and unending resurrection life. Our bodies are meant to be a living sacrifice to God. In other words, what we do and say -- how we live our lives -- reflects our worship and love of God, and our thanksgiving to God for all our blessings. In 1 Corinthians (6:20), Paul says this, "For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." Elsewhere, Paul reminds us that we are not our own, but belong to God. He is not just talking about being good stewards of our bodies, but also about God's gracious hospitality – the gift of His Son, Jesus, the Word made flesh, and the gift of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the hearts of the Body of Christ throughout the world. God's hospitality is also extended by how you and I share God's gift literally through our bodies, modeling God's love in word and deed.

As Jesus eats a piece of broiled fish with his disciples, we are reminded of the feeding of the five thousand. God's abundant life-giving grace and sustenance was, is, and ever will be, found in Jesus Christ. This is another example of God's holy hospitality, and a mirror of the continued call to feed and care for the hungry at all times. Beyond God's provision of our daily bread, and in turn our loving care for others, we gather to receive Holy Communion. In this simple act of table fellowship, we are joined with all the saints of heaven around God's table to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, the food and drink of new and unending life in Him. This feast of thanksgiving is the real food of life that strengthens us on our earthly journey. It transforms us to Christ-likeness, and reminds you and me that one day we will all be with the Lord at the heavenly banquet table.

After eating in the presence of the disciples, Jesus opens their minds to understand the scriptures. I don't know about you, but I've always been really disappointed that the crucial details of that Scripture

lesson are notably absent! We get the message, however, because in order to teach and preach the Word, we must accept God's holy hospitality, and take the time to eat and drink the Word, to swallow it and let the Word become a part of the fleshy fabric of our being. There's no shortcut to this life-long process – no easy list of the key Scriptures – because all the Scriptures reveal different aspects of God's love and salvation. Luke is careful to tell us that faith doesn't come from just seeing the risen Lord, but when the whole Word of God is unfolded as well. In Proverbs 8:3 we read, "Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it." We are in the Great Fifty Days of Easter now, but let's remember that the season of Lent was preparing us in body, mind and spirit to understand the Paschal mystery revealed in Jesus' resurrection. What does the church invite us all to do to prepare for Easter? In the Book of Common Prayer at page 265, the Ash Wednesday service contains an invitation to observe a Holy Lent. We are invited to self-examination, repentance, prayer, fasting, self-denial, and reading and meditating on God's holy Word. Lent is particularly set aside for these practices, but not exclusively. Each of these Christian disciplines are separately and together great elements of our daily life in Christ. Do we need to fast every day? Probably not. Do we need to read God's word, pray and ask for God's forgiveness every day? If my experience is anything to go by, yes we do! These are ways that you and I practice God's graciousness. They are also ways that we practice the reciprocal gift of God's hospitality – receiving the Word, so that we might share it with others.

Finally, as members of the Body of Christ, you and I are a part of the new community that is formed around Jesus Christ. Just like the first disciples, we are charged as witness of all these things that are the Good News of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. We may be a long way from Jerusalem, but that is cause for celebration as a measure of how the Word is spreading. The Holy Hospitality is still inviting you and me to enter. Why not bring a friend to share the gift. I think that's what Jesus would do, don't you?

Amen.