

The Third Sunday of Easter

Luke 24:36-49

The disciples were *terrified and frightened*, we hear today of Holy Scripture, to have the risen Saviour pronounce His peace upon them. Well, at least that is one spin we could put on what we hear today; that they were terrified and frightened to have the risen Saviour pronounce His peace upon them. Those are the facts, are they not? *Jesus Himself stood in their midst and said to them: "Peace with you."*, Holy Scripture says, *but they were terrified and frightened*. So we easily ridicule their reaction to having the peace of God announced unto them; it does seem somewhat off. That it is not all that Holy Scripture says, though; and it was not really because the risen Saviour pronounced His peace upon them that they were terrified and frightened, but rather because they were not yet aware that there was a risen Saviour at all. Well, two of them were; they had already recognised the risen Saviour a few hours earlier, when the stranger who had spoken to them on their way and opened the Scriptures to them as to how the Christ had to suffer and enter into His glory had sat at table with them, and taken bread, and blessed it and broken it, and given it to them, as He had once before. But that is beside the point, I suppose, except in so far as that it was when these two returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven and those who were with them to tell them about this, that the risen Saviour stood in their midst and pronounced His peace upon them.

And so we can safely assume that those of the disciples who were terrified and frightened were those who had up until then not been aware that there is a risen Saviour; although we do not actually have to assume anything, since Holy Scripture tells us that they *supposed they had seen a spirit*, a demon, that is, or a ghost, perhaps, but certainly not Himself, and it was therefore they were terrified and frightened, not because they heard the risen Saviour pronounce His peace upon them, for, again, it seems that they had no comprehension as of yet, that that was what they heard, if they really heard anything at all.

And since their fears were obviously not overcome by having the risen Saviour pronounce His peace upon them, He went through the motions of assuring them that it was really He Himself standing in their midst, and not merely a spirit, neither an evil one nor someone or something not real.

Behold my hands and my feet, He said, that it is I. And: Handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.

And after they had seen that it was really the risen Saviour who stood in their midst, they not only marvelled, they also *disbelieved for joy*, Holy Scripture says; they really were not making things easy for Him, were they?

We never do, really, make things easy for Him, do we? After all, it really is not all that easy for us, either, to relate to the risen Saviour Himself, not only to the reality that He is risen, and arisen indeed, but also that He is our Saviour, and is that indeed, and that He Himself is in our midst, indeed, and for real, and is that as our risen Saviour.

Well, many who claim to be Christian would just as soon that He were *not* real. Not that they would rather He did not exist; they do want to be part of a culture they consider *Christian*. But they would prefer for Him not to be *Himself*, not as He really is, and makes Himself known in Holy Scripture.

In fact, many who claim to be Christian will not know of Him at all as He makes Himself known in Holy Scripture; they convince themselves that He is not really like that, that not all that Holy Scripture teaches is to be taken seriously, and submitted to, as the Truth of God. What they actually believe is that the *real* truth is to be found somewhere in between what Holy Scripture teaches and what they themselves would like to be true; they sort out for themselves which teachings of Holy Scripture they will take to heart, and which they will ignore. Whatever they want to do, they do, with no regard for what Holy Scripture says about it. Some embrace and endorse and advocate whatever kind of religious practice or preaching makes them feel good, even if it goes against the faith Holy Scripture teaches, and even if it is preached and taught to them by women, although Holy Scripture so clearly forbids women from preaching and teaching. If somebody they like decides to live in a manner forbidden by Holy Scripture, some will insist that God actually approves of that choice. Some have no qualms about speaking poorly in public about anyone they do not like, or even lying outright, knowing full well that Holy Scripture forbids it, and encouraging others to join them in their ungodliness. Some will disapprove, when *repentance be proclaimed in His name for the remission of sins*, as we hear it today that our Lord Jesus says that it must, and demand that the Church no longer do that, but preach and teach instead whatever they find more interesting and exciting.

Many Christians leave but little room for our Lord Jesus in real life, and in the real world, as He really is, and makes Himself known in Holy Scripture.

Well, it really is not easy for any of us to relate to the risen Saviour as being real, and being arisen indeed, as the Saviour who actually lives and works in His Church, and has His Truth spoken to us, and His salvation given to us. So easily we come to think of His Word as just words we say in Church, the faith as just something we *think*, the Truth of God as some hybrid of what Holy Scripture teaches and what we ourselves think, and what most unbelievers believe in our day and age.

It is as the holy Apostle Paul writes it: *natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, nor can he perceive them, for they are but spiritually discerned. We will only receive and perceive the things of God in so far as He Himself makes us to; because, as the Apostle also writes it elsewhere, the intent of the flesh is enmity against God, of sinful human nature, that is, and it does not submit to the Law of God, indeed, it cannot. God Himself must overcome our unwillingness to acknowledge Him as God, and our devotion to the devil and his lie: that we are alike to God, or at least almost alike to Him, as rightful judges and masters of good and evil.*

Well, there is that. And then there is this: that what His faithful Church preaches and teaches, it is just too good to be true, is it not, and to be believed, that we are right with God, and righteous before His judgement, in spite of our sins and shortcomings, all impurity and ungodliness and unbelief that is in our hearts and minds, and in our lives, that full forgiveness for all sin is given to us freely and for nothing, out of the goodness of God and for no other reason whatsoever, rescue from eternal agony in Hell, and eternal life instead, with God in glory, and this at the most terrible cost to Himself, that the Son of God, who is Himself God from eternity, had Himself born into our kind, and baptised into us, and made one with us, and with our sin, and suffered for us His own judgement against it, the fullness of death and devastation, the hatred of His holy goodness against all things evil and impure. It is too good to be true, too good to be believed, and so we cannot believe it, and we do not, just as we hear it today, also, that the disciples *disbelieved for joy.*

The risen Saviour Himself must work it in us that we come to know Him as our risen Saviour, to know Him to be arisen, and arisen indeed, and be in our midst indeed, in His Church, as the risen Saviour, to actually save.

We hear it today how He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. We hear, also, how He still opens the minds of those whom He will save, so that we are indeed saved, that thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that in His name repentance should be proclaimed for the remission of sins to all nations. And you are witnesses of these things.

Thus it was written, and thus it was necessary, for such was the eternal will of God; from eternity He resolved to reveal His goodness by rescuing sinners from His rightful wrath against our sin and restore us to His love, and at the most terrible cost to Himself, by having His Son endure the fullness of suffering for those He would save.

And in His Church's proclamation of repentance for the remission of sins the goodness of God shines upon us, in the Word of His love, what the Son has suffered for us, and shines into us, with the power of His love and His life.

As we also hear it today that He said it to those men He would send as *witnesses of these things*, that *I am sending the promise of my Father upon you*, that is: the Holy Spirit, who is the very life and breath of God, and His power of life, and: *you will be clothed with power from on High*.

This is how He works it in us that we come to know Him as our risen Saviour, to know Him to be arisen, and arisen indeed, as our Saviour, and to be in our midst indeed, in the life of His Church, as the risen Saviour, to save.

Through the men He sends and sets as Pastors in His Church, He Himself speaks His Word of love and life, and breathes His love and His life into the hearts of those who hear, so that we come alive to His love and begin to believe in His love, as He shines His love upon us, and into us, with the assurance of faith, which is an assurance so much stronger, so much more real, than it would be for us to see Him, or handle Him, or even to feel His presence in our hearts, because it is the promise of God, and the reality of God. And in our innermost hearts we come to know Him as our risen Saviour, and to know His salvation, and we begin to love Him, as His love lives in us, His love for us, and His love for the Father, and binds our hearts to His love in the obedience of faith, and we sense that we owe Him ourselves, all that we are and all that we have, who has given Himself for us, and gives Himself to us, with all that He is and all that is His.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing. Amen.