

Third Sunday of Easter 2021

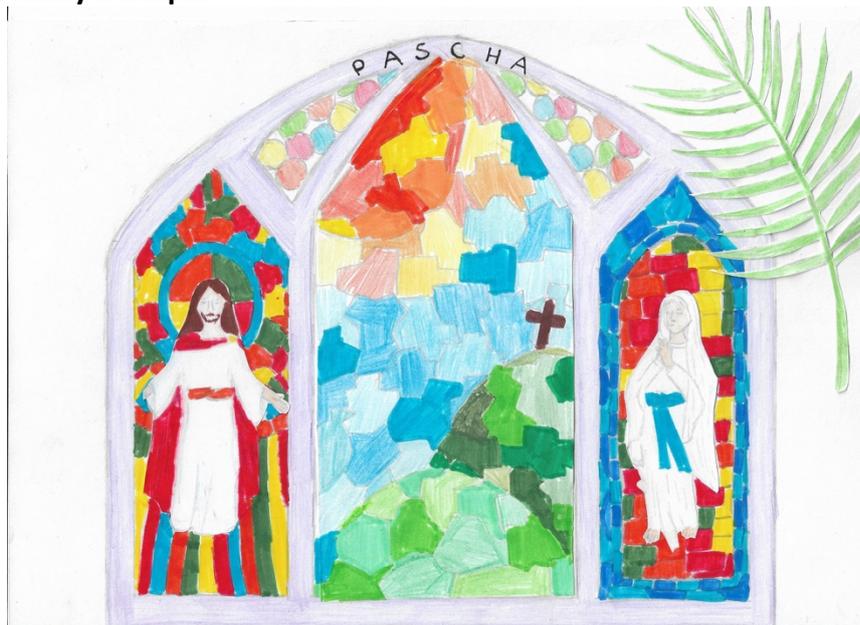
A Reflection by Fr Sylvester O'Flynn OFM Cap., Rochestown, Cork

The Risen Lord is with us

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to enter a Time Machine and go back to Galilee or Jerusalem and spend a day in the company of Jesus? To see his face, to hear his voice, to touch his garment, maybe to see a miracle to cap it all. Wouldn't it be easy to believe after that? But as the song in the musical, *Porgy and Bess*, tells us, "It ain't necessarily so." There were many people who saw Jesus, even miracles, yet they walked away from him and one of the apostles even betrayed him. Physical seeing is not necessarily believing.

The forty days between the Resurrection and final Ascension of the Lord were a time of preparation when the Risen Lord came back to various people to help them make the transition from seeing in a physical way to knowing him by faith. As he said to Thomas, "You believe because you can see me, but blessed are those who have not seen yet believe."

Today's Gospel



Our Gospel today is Luke 24:35-48, a continuation of the encounter of the Risen Lord with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Their moment of faith came at the breaking of bread, which was one of the early names for the celebration of the Eucharist. Their eyes were opened and they recognised the Risen Lord. Just as we, at the end of Mass, are sent

out on a mission to love and serve the Lord, these two headed back towards Jerusalem on a mission of proclaiming the Resurrection.

They were told that Peter also had met the Lord. But others in the room had not yet made the step of believing. Then the Lord stood among them and greeted them with peace. If you read the story carefully, take note of the negative feelings. Some thought it was a ghost, they were alarmed, frightened, agitated, full of doubts, dumbfounded. If you are familiar with the type of meditation that asks you to put yourself into the story, would you identify with any of these obstacles or negative feelings? The Risen Lord calmed their agitation as he prayed for them, "Peace be with you." To assure them of his identity he showed them the wounds of nails in his hands and feet. Not only that but he invited them to touch the wounds. This was not a ghost. This was more than an apparition, it was a real presence.

Beside you and within you

It reminds me of a day when students in a seminary preparing for priesthood were on a day of recollection. Their spiritual guide for the day asked them to ponder on the Emmaus story for an hour before writing where they most felt the presence of the Lord in their lives. When the hour was over, they had time for a breath of fresh air. Two students who were close friends were walking down a tree-lined avenue. One was quite agitated. He was going through a period when he was very unsure of his vocation. He confessed to his friend that this hour of meditation really upset him. All he could write at the end was one angry sentence. "Jesus, where the so-and-so are you?" His friend smiled and said that he too had written just one short sentence. "I am right here beside you and within you." In that brief moment, the agitated one found the Lord's peace and the courage to continue on the road to ordination. The spirituality of the Easter season is based on pondering on the scripture stories so as to open up the eyes of faith enabling us recognise how the Risen Lord is right here beside us and within us.

Present in family life

Luke adds a lovely homely touch to the story when Jesus asked "Have you anything here to eat?" It is only in Luke's Gospel that one would find this reference to a homely meal. Scholars have counted no fewer than ten meals in this gospel, each one having a significance. One writer, a bit tongue in cheek, said that in Luke's Gospel, Jesus is either at a meal, going to a meal or coming from a meal. Food or its growth is mentioned in every chapter of Luke. What is the significance of this meal where he took and ate a piece of grilled fish? What I see in this homely meal is the importance of family life for the transmission and formation of faith. Jews have a saying that God has no grandchildren. If parents do not pass on religious belief and the practice of prayer, how can the children become believers?

Symbols, action and stories

Pope Francis recognises that family life has changed radically in recent years and older recipes do not always work. He suggests that children need symbols, actions and stories. A symbol might be a crucifix, holy water, lighting a candle at certain times, a crib, a statue, or grace before meals. The good example of Christian action might be a collection box for the poor, respect for the name of the Lord, participation in local social work. Stories are the best way for passing on the faith: biblical stories, examples of the saints. Would a visitor to your home see any evidence that this is a Christian family?

Prayer

Risen Lord Jesus, you came through closed doors to step into rooms of fear, agitation, worry, doubts and lack of direction. You prayed peace on all in these rooms. Belief in your resurrection tells us that you are beside us and within us. Remove the cataracts that prevent us from recognising you. Open our eyes to discern the signs of your presence, our ears to receive your teaching and our hearts to experience your personal love for us. Breathe forth your peace upon us.

(Extract from Silvester O'Flynn, *Gospel Reflections and Prayers*, Columba Books – used with permission.)