

3rd Sunday of Easter “Ramifications of the Resurrection”

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My friends, I believe that one of the hardest parts about living through a pandemic is the loss of human touch. It has been over a year since I have been able to give any of my family members a proper hug. I used to be able to shake hundreds of hands each weekend. Elbow taps are OK but it just doesn't feel the same. Zoom meetings have been a wonderful way to stay connected; but on the other hand, zoom meetings can never replace physical presence. As human beings, we are not comprised of just spirit. We are en-fleshed spirits. We are corporeal beings. Even with the aches and pains, occasional sniffles and stomach aches, it is truly a blessing to simply be alive, to experience being alive in the flesh, and to be physically present to each other the best we can.

At first glance, this may seem to be a simple and straightforward idea, but at second glance, you may be surprised that the belief in the goodness of the body marks a fundamental difference between religions. For example, when I was in college I was interested in comparative religion. During that time, I enjoyed learning more about a number of different faith traditions such as Buddhism. Although there are many interesting aspects about Buddhism, I was fascinated to learn that one of its beginning insights is that everything is *dukkha*, translated: all is pain, falsehood and deception. The idea is: our physical bodies are the result of karma from which we need liberation. Notice that the beginning insight of Christianity, however, is radically different. We believe that God created the universe, and it is good! God created matter, and it is good!

In Buddhist systems, we are to renounce the physical world of matter so to liberate the light trapped within us. Christianity, however, says God became flesh in Jesus Christ. There can be no better affirmation of matter than God being born on Earth in the flesh. Furthermore, we were created in the flesh in the image and likeness of God. The Christian perspective is, to be in the flesh is good, to eat is good, to see and to taste is good, and to hear and to feel is good. I believe this is a distinctively Judeo-Christian insight. Flesh is not evil. Flesh is good. It is sin that takes good things and corrupts them, as St. John tells us in our second reading.

There is reason why our readings focus on this. Throughout the Gospels and letters of the New Testament, you discover little clues of the Early Church's conversation with splinter groups called *Docetists* or *Gnostics* who denied that being in the flesh was a good thing. The Gnostic Gospels you may have heard about fall into that category. The Early Church rejected these so called “Gospels” because they were determined not to be apostolic and they denied that Jesus was really and truly human. I mention all of this because we see this conversation happening in the Early Church in our Gospel reading today.

The Gospel of Luke goes to great lengths to tell us that the Risen Lord was not a ghost or phantom. Jesus invites them, “Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” How clear is that? There is even a kind of funny moment when the risen Jesus asks for food to eat and eats a piece of baked fish in front of them, just so we don’t miss this point. The risen Lord has a body that could touch and be touched. And we will have resurrected bodies too someday! Why? Because having a physical body is a good thing.

It is interesting how many heresies have a way of making their way into modern times. I say this because many still hold that we will not have physical bodies in the afterlife or that bodies can be just disposed of after we are dead. And yet, the Gospel of Luke this weekend gives us a look at what our resurrected bodies will be able to do. The Gospel says that we will be able to touch and be touched. It says we will be able to eat food and engage in conversation. The Gospel therefore invites us to have wonder, awe, and respect for the human body. Furthermore, the resurrection of our Lord in the body has ramifications on how we treat our bodies and other people’s bodies from the moment of conception to the day of our burial, regardless of our social economic status, what country we were born in or the color of our skin. We reach out in charity towards those who are hungry or marginalized because they are sacred too in eyes of God, body and soul. Even after we have passed away our earthly bodies are to be respected. This is why the Church insists that we have funeral liturgies and proper burials for our loved ones who have passed away in the hopes of rising again. Why? Because even our earthly remains are sacred and to be treated with respect!

This past year with Covid-19, we have come to understand how important human contact is. Physical presence matters. We hope and pray for a day when it is safe enough to hug each other and shake hands again. However, this longing should tell us something about how blessed we are to be en-fleshed spirits. The resurrection of our Lord tells us that the human body is not just special but indeed sacred. And invitation this week is to count the ways.