

3rd Sunday of Easter. 4/18/2021

Recognizing Jesus

Years ago, we spent a summer in Mexico. I couldn't take all the time off from work, so Zandra went ahead first with the kids, and I stayed behind for some time. My brother came to visit me, and we had a great time. And while my family was away, one of the things my brother and I did together was to shave our heads. I did have hair back then, so it made a difference.

Later when I joined Zandra and the kids in Mexico, it was a surprise. I remember especially the reaction of Benjamin, who was a toddler and hadn't seen me for a month. I crouched down to start talking to him. For the next few seconds, I could see a series of expressions in his face:

surprise, confusion, shock, fear. He was about to cry. But then he recognized me and was very happy. He hug me, sat in my lap and didn't want to move from there. Did he recognize my eyes, my voice? I don't know, but at some point, it was clear it was his dad, even if it was somehow different. And it was wonderful to be reunited.

In some of the narratives of the resurrected Lord, the disciples have difficulty recognizing him. Today we hear that they were startled, terrified, incredulous for joy, and amazed. He is the same Jesus who was walking, talking and eating with them just a few days ago, and yet he is different. He is flesh and bones and at the same time he isn't subject to the limitations of the body, as he appears or disappears from their sight. He is the same Jesus but is now living a new form of existence that has been open up

by his resurrection, a new creation in which we are to share as well.

Jesus goes through great lengths to reassure and convince his disciples: Look at my hands and my feet. Come, touch me. Give me some food to show you I eat. It is me.

Finally, their eyes and minds are opened, and they recognize him. He is different, living in this new reality that they cannot comprehend, but it is him. They are certain.

This certainty is going to pull all their lives towards Jesus and God's plan for salvation. Having witnessed this new reality, their hearts burn, they are moved to share joyfully the good news of Christ. And they will receive a supernatural strength to go and proclaim, announce, preach, even in the face of severe struggle.

This is what we see Peter doing in our first reading, as he calls himself as witness and shares the good news with fellow Jews. Peter does not overlook sin. On the contrary, he bluntly tells them that they handed over and put to death Jesus, the author of life. But God raised him from the death, in fulfillment of what had been announced through the prophets. And it is sinners that Jesus came to call. They can repent and come to Christ, and their sins will be wiped away.

These witnesses of the resurrected body shared the good news, and people who heard them could recognize the truth. They lived in a different way. They found their personal dignity. The Church grew, bringing new sons and daughters to a meaningful and fulfilling life in Christ.

Today, it is our turn to encounter Christ and to be witnesses, to bring the good news to the world. The presence of the resurrected Christ continues to be a mix of things familiar and things mysterious. As with the early disciples, he comes to us and offers us new life, and we need to take a step of faith to accept it. We can ask him to open our eyes and hearts to recognize him in the sacraments, in our daily prayer and in the events of our daily lives. Our witness will grow out of what we see and experience, and how the certainty of faith changes our lives and touches everything we do.

Nurtured by the sacraments and living in the hope of the final victory of Christ resurrected, our lives look different, attractive, peaceful, meaningful. This is the witness that

we, as the mystical body of Christ, ought to bring to the world.