

### Third Sunday of Easter – B

This Sunday's Gospel gives us Luke's version of the story John told us last week, and he gives it his own twists and context and particular focus. We seemingly start in the same room with the gathered disciples, but this time they are talking about the report that Jesus had appeared to Simon. Then the two disciples who had recognized Jesus at the table in Emmaus add their testimony. By now the disciples have heard the women announce that Jesus was raised, they heard that Simon had seen him, and these last two reported that they had broken bread with him.

While the disciples were questioning what was happening, they suddenly perceived Jesus among them. In spite of his greeting of peace, they presumed they were seeing a ghost. The point of Jesus asking for something to eat is to bring them away from that conclusion. He's not a ghost. He has truly been raised from the dead.

Although they were still far from genuine belief, Luke shows us that their imprisonment in tragedy and hopelessness was beginning to crumble.

As Luke tells the story, Jesus transformed the disciples' frightened depression into the possibility of hope by opening their minds to understand the Scriptures, not from their perspective, but from his. Just as he had done with the two disciples he had encountered on the road to Emmaus, Jesus transformed their understanding, and they began to reinterpret not only their faith, but their entire way of living.

Reinterpretation is the task of every age. While Scripture consistently offers us transformation, each time and culture has

the task of reinterpreting the transformative character of the Gospel into categories that come from its frame of reference. We understand God through our lenses rather than through God's self-revelation. Unfortunately, no culture or period of history gets it totally right.

Today's reading from the first letter of St. John is particularly susceptible to being misinterpreted. John tells us, "We have an advocate with the Father. ... He is expiation for our sins." The first inclination upon hearing this is to think of a court room scene and of us as the defendants. Jesus' job in this frame of reference is to pacify God's justifiable wrath by paying the price of human sin.

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That point of view springs from and reinforces the conviction that crime deserves punishment, and that people must pay for their sins. Such thinking supports everything from fines for traffic violations to mandatory sentencing norms and capital punishment.

Theologically, this thinking supports the idea that Jesus paid God off for human sin, so we are saved.

The trouble with that theory is that, applied to God, it demotes our divine lover to the level of a rule-bound authoritarian, portraying God in conformity with narrow, even petty, human norms.

Instead of allowing such an unfounded image of God to guide our theology, we do better to think about God in light of what we know from Jesus. When we start from what Jesus has told us about the Father, we begin with an image of God who longs to draw humanity into the life that Father, Son, and Spirit share in the Trinity.

Taking that as our starting point, we see St. John explaining that, "Jesus is the advocate God sends to sinners. He pleads with us on behalf of God who has limitless love and desire to be with us — and not only us, but the whole world."

That's what St. Peter is getting at in his homily quoted in today's selection from the Acts of the Apostles: God, who knows you acted in ignorance, has taken the worst that could happen, and transformed it into an offer of salvation. Peter invited his audience to metanoia, that transformation of mindset that leads to a new approach to life.

What happened in Jesus' resurrection is a matter of fact; its meaning and effects depend on interpretation. Moving through life, we can cling to our own points of view, or, like the disciples, we can allow ourselves to be confused enough for Jesus to open our minds to understand in new ways.

Jesus, the advocate with the Father has been given that role by no one other than the same Father. We can trust in the effectiveness of his office. We can let fear go, along with all the burdens it brings with it. Instead, we can accept the offer of peace that Christ is constantly extending.