

Eyewitnesses of the Resurrection

Third Sunday of Easter - Jn 21:1-19

Ave Maria Catholic Church, May 1, 2022 - Fr. David M Vidal

“Children, have you caught anything to eat?” (Jn. 21). This is the way in which the risen Lord speaks to the Apostles as he stands on the shore. How gentle is Jesus! How kind and loving! He could have shared all his glory, splendor, and power at that time, but He wanted to introduce the disciples with great kindness to the mystery of his Resurrection. He gives them time to see, to touch, and to believe.

The words of St. John’s gospel are echoed in St. John’s first letter, where he writes: *“That which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands... we also proclaim to you”* (1 Jn. 1:1-3).

Faith in Jesus’s resurrection has its origin in a historical event. The apostles witnessed this event: they saw, they heard, and they touched the risen Lord. Then, they proclaimed Jesus’s resurrection.

Together with the apostles, we profess that Jesus rose from the dead.

In the Apostle's Creed, we profess: *“The third day he rose from the dead,”* and with the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: *“On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures.”* It is a dogma of our faith, based upon a fact that historically took place and was verified.

“With minds bowed down,” let us try to examine some biblical texts that attest to the resurrection of Jesus.

The oldest written testimony to Christ's Resurrection is found in the First Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians (about Easter, A.D. 57). St. Paul writes: *“I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James and then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he also appeared to me”* (1 Cor 15:3-8).

In this text, St. Paul not only speaks of the resurrection as having taken place on the third day *“in accordance with the scriptures”* (a biblical reference that already presents the theological dimension of the fact) but at the same time, he mentions eyewitnesses, those to whom Christ appeared personally. These “witnesses to Christ's resurrection” (see Acts 1:22) are first the apostles, but St. Paul speaks of even more than five hundred people to

whom Jesus appeared at one time and offers the historical fact that when he wrote the letter, most of them were still living!

The encounter with the risen Lord was a personal experience.

When it came to the choice of Matthias, the one who took the place of Judas Iscariot, the apostles required as a condition that the candidate to be chosen should not only have accompanied them during the time of Jesus' teaching and mission but, above all, that he should be a "*witness to his resurrection,*" (Acts 1:22).

This is in truth, verification that the resurrection is not a "product" of the imagination of the first Christian community. It is not an invention of the apostles. They were not expecting Jesus's resurrection. Their discouragement from Christ's passion and death was so great that they did not initially believe the news of his resurrection.

In the Gospel we just read today, the apostles returned to the Sea of Tiberias. They were Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, Zebedee's sons, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter had said: "*I am going fishing.*" And the rest answered: "*We also will come with you.*" From being simple fishers, they had been called by Jesus to be fishers of men. But now, they were returning to their old business. Jesus has died, and they went back to their old ways.

However, Jesus comes and awakens them with a miracle. Jesus says: "*Cast the net over the right side of the boat, and you will find something.*" And so, they do, and they caught 153 large fish (even the number was kept for our belief). And John confesses: "*It is the Lord!*"

John says, "It is the Lord!" after Jesus's death on the Cross. At this precise moment in time, John's declaration is very meaningful! It is a testimony to the truth that Jesus died on the cross, and he was buried as it was witnessed, but now "the Lord is risen."

Jesus's resurrection is a historical fact. St. Peter wrote to the first Christians: "*We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty*" (2 Pt 1:16).

Jesus's resurrection is also the center of our faith. A famous scholar, Romano Guardini, meditating on the paschal mystery and its implications for the life of the believer and the Church, observes that "with Jesus's resurrection stands or falls Christian faith. It is no supplement to that faith. [But] it is the center of our religion," (*The Lord*, Part 6, I).

Finally, Jesus's resurrection must be reflected in our lives.

In today's Gospel, Jesus asks Peter: "*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*" Not once, not twice, but three times! And Peter answers: "*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*" "*Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.*" Three times Peter denied Jesus, and now, he manifests his love for Jesus by proclaiming his love for Him three times as well.

We believe in Jesus's resurrection, but that is not enough. Do we love the risen Lord? Do we embrace Him and everything He brings to us with his resurrection? Perhaps, we will answer as Peter did: "Lord, you know that I love you." And if we answer as Peter did, we might also hear the words of Jesus saying: "Feed my lambs . . . feed my sheep." Or in other words, your love must be seen in works, in concrete actions that manifest your love.

Jesus rose from the dead, and we profess our faith in his resurrection. We must also proclaim our love for Him with our lips and with our works.

Let us follow the great crowd of witnesses who proclaimed the resurrection of the Lord.
Amen