

# Homily for the Third Sunday of Easter

April 16, 2018

Some years ago I formulated TOPEL'S RULE: "Never ascribe to human malice what can better be explained by human ignorance." Perhaps I learned this from my ethics teacher, who said, "More evil is done in the world by people of good will than by evil people." Ignorance is a theme of today's readings.

**Peter in Acts** delivers a powerful sermon to his brother Jews. The God of their ancestors sent them Jesus as the Holy and Righteous One, but they killed him. In fact, what they killed was not just a holy man or even a prophet, but the very Author of Life, God. Of course, they did not know this; they acted out of ignorance. But God has raised Jesus from the dead and those who are proclaiming him are just God's witnesses to the fulfilment of salvation history---even the Messiah must suffer and die for the truth that God is love. Now, as a result of their proclamation of Jesus' vindication, they have the chance to be converted, have their sins forgiven, and enter into life.

Many were converted by his words, but more did not believe these witnesses either. They continued the ignorance of their fathers.

**Luke** tells us that the disciples to whom the risen Christ appeared were also ignorant. First of all they did not believe in the admittedly very faint Old Testament prophecies of the resurrection from the dead. And so they are startled by the appearance of Jesus, thinking him to be a ghost. Jesus shows them his hands and feet, with the holes left by the nails on the cross. The risen Christ is the crucified Jesus, not a ghost. But since they are still incredulous, he takes the fish they give him and eats it, the way a human would. Then as he did for the disciples on the road to Emmaus, he opens their minds to what the Scriptures say about the messiah having to die and then rise on the third day. Finally, he tells them that he will empower them with his Holy Spirit to proclaim salvation through Christ to the whole world.

## The Meaning for us

First and foremost, that Jesus' way is God's way. What Jesus says his disciples must do --to love all, give all, forgive all, and not condemn---that is the way to justice and peace on earth and eternal happiness in heaven. If you want these things, you too must die to your own selfish desires and live as Jesus did. But we resist his message, because it is the way of cross. We don't come to knowledge of the real Jesus because we are afraid of what he will ask of us. And so we remain in our ignorance of what would save us.

We all have areas of ignorance,. We don't know the great mysteries---who or what God is, who our spouse really is; in fact we don't even know who we ourselves truly are. These forms of ignorance are unavoidable for humans. But there are other forms of ignorance where we shut our eyes to reality, because we do not want to know the truth. This culpable ignorance is everywhere in our society, but especially in our politics.

The chief priests resisted Jesus because he challenged their way of life, the money and power they got from the temple sacrifices. The Pharisees resisted him because he challenged their prestige as teachers and took away their authority as teachers of the law. Our world resists Jesus because we are comfortable with our way of life..

We hear the cries of agony from our neighbor's house, but we do not investigate, because we would get involved. We do not stop to know the homeless, because their story may cause us to reach out to them or even to get involved in the politics of homelessness. We do not accept refugees into this country because it will disturb our peace.

But in each of those cases, Christ has identified himself with these poor. When he summons all the nations of the earth he call them to task because in refusing to provide food, clothing, shelter to their own people, they refused him. And so we remain in our ignorance of Christ because we refuse to accept the cross as even the Son of God had to do.

So how do we get healed from this culpable ignorance? By opening the gospels and reading about who Jesus was, his teaching, his values. By understanding our Eucharist as not just for us in the pews, but for the world outside of our church. If we read devoutly, we come to fall in love with Jesus and then His Spirit makes us into Jesus for our family, our neighborhood, our world.

Easter is the triumph of those who open their eyes to what Jesus said and did, as a possibility for us. But for many of us, the triumph is small because we have not been open to how miraculous and surprising is God's vindication of exactly what Jesus did and said.

This Easter season is a time of rebirth, not just for those who were baptized at the Ester vigil, but for all of us. During what remains of this season, open your eyes to the triumph of Jesus' way, and ask God sincerely to open your eyes and hearts to what Jesus is now calling you to.

It is the good news.

And how do you do this? By letting Jesus' Holy Spirit empower you. This you do by reading the gospels, falling in love with Jesus, receiving Jesus in the Eucharist, and so being Jesus in your family , your neighborhood, your parish, your world.