

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter (Year A): Faith is ‘caught’ rather than ‘taught’.**  
**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Acts 2:14+22-28: the earliest preaching – to a Jewish audience;**  
**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: 1 Peter 1:17-21: we are ransomed by Jesus’ Precious Blood;**  
**Gospel; Luke 24: 13-35: at Emmaus, 2 disciples recognize the risen Jesus.**

For anyone whose faith is floundering slightly, these readings are a good tonic. They make us realize that belief in our Lord cannot be acquired from books alone: it must involve contact with a community whose people share their beliefs and experiences with others. That basic point comes over in all 3 readings this Sunday and is why recent popes have stressed that The Church must be missionary, if she is to be true to the task Christ gave her.

In the first reading, we hear the earliest proclamation of the Christian message – St Peter (with the others) addressing a crowd in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. The Acts of the Apostles preserves several similar speeches for us, and they are probably how the meaning of Jesus was first put across to the Jewish people. Peter had to use Jewish ideas to get his listeners to grasp what Jesus meant, so the style of his speech may seem strange to us. At that time, most Jews could not understand how a “good” person would be allowed to suffer innocently, because suffering was seen as punishment for sin. Peter shows that Jesus’ death was not an accident or fluke: “This man, who was put into your power *by the deliberate intention & foreknowledge of God*, you had crucified...but God raised him to life.” The resurrection vindicated Jesus, and Peter shows this by quoting from Psalm 15 (RC number) - this Sunday’s responsorial psalm: “You will not leave my soul among the dead, nor let your beloved know decay”.

St Peter’s ideas are also the theme of the 2<sup>nd</sup> reading, as it is from his First Letter. Again, he wants to show that what Jesus suffered was not some ghastly mistake, but part of a loving plan – for us – from God the Father. “The ransom that was paid to free you were not paid in anything corruptible – neither in silver nor in gold – but in the precious blood of a lamb without spot or stain, namely Christ. Through him, you now have faith in God, who raised him from the dead.” This takes the point Peter made in his early speech in Jerusalem a lot further. The resurrection is not just a matter of vindicating Jesus as having been a good man, nor even of rewarding him from his sufferings – it is a fact that helps us to have faith and confidence. I suggest that the idea of a conflict between good and evil – where the evil seemed to have ‘won’ on Mount Calvary – still affects us today. I mentioned last week, in respect of ‘Doubting’ Thomas, that we can have doubts about God’s will or “Providence” when we think of suffering in the world. It can be the wars in Ukraine and elsewhere, the apparent chaos in much of Africa, or even the cost-of-living crisis here at home. In these cases, it is hard to see any sense of purpose, or any place for hope. That is exactly how many of Peter’s Jewish listeners and readers would have interpreted the execution of a good man

like Jesus. Peter argues that, while the act of killing him remained evil, it was allowed by God because of the love it showed for the human race, and the resurrection was proof of that. When people suffer today, it is up to us to try to overcome the worst effects by our love for others. Then, evil does not win.

This is also the idea in the gospel. (I ask you to read it for yourself!) The story of the Road to Emmaus may be long, but it is straightforward. Two disciples (not part of the 12 apostles) were on their 7-mile walk from Jerusalem on Easter Sunday afternoon, when the risen Jesus appeared to them. Again, he was not recognized in his risen state, so he seemed to them like a friendly stranger. Having told him of Jesus' execution, and how their hopes "that he would be the one to set Israel free" had been dashed, they related what they knew of the events of that Sunday. Some of the women of their group had gone to the tomb, but found it empty; later, they "had seen a vision of angels who declared Jesus was alive". After that, they had no more information. At this point, Jesus explained how some Old Testament texts, correctly understood, could indicate how the future Messiah would have to suffer, as part of God's will. (He would almost certainly be meaning the four "Suffering Servant" songs in Isaiah, which were mentioned several times in Lent & Holy Week.)

Having got to Emmaus, Jesus was persuaded to stay with them. As their guest at the dinner-table, was invited to bless the meal; he did so by taking the bread and "their eyes were opened" – they recognized him immediately, but he vanished from their sight. Despite the time, they went back to Jerusalem, where they met some of the others. By now, the disciples were beginning to accept that Jesus was alive, and had appeared to Simon (Peter).

St Luke makes two important points for us. First, the two men later said that "their hearts burned within them" when Jesus explained the scriptures to them. Could it be true? Could there have been some divine purpose to this awful execution after all? Could the dead Jesus now be alive? That is like us, when we begin to have some hope in a difficult situation, and have the sense that things are not as bleak as they may have seemed at first.

His second point is more spiritual. They said they "recognized Jesus at the breaking of bread". While that is how it was at Emmaus, the phrase "breaking of bread" was also an early title for the Eucharist, or Mass. When you and I share it, we are also invited to recognize Jesus in it. The miraculous power that caused his resurrection is God's same creative force that transforms ordinary human food (bread & wine) into the real presence of his risen Son. The title for this homily says that faith is more 'caught than taught'. We do need some teaching – that's point of any sermon – but we also need to 'catch' a living faith from each other. The best place for doing that is in the Holy Eucharist. *Fr Jim Dunne.*