

Third Sunday of Easter

First reading:

*The Meaning of Resurrection
(Acts 2.14, 22-28)*

Pentecost was the birthday of the Church, the moment when the Christian Church was born. This reading from Peter's speech at Pentecost explains not so much the actual event of the gift of the Spirit, but the event which lies behind it, the Resurrection. Peter sees it as predicted in the psalm: the Holy One of the Lord can never remain lying in the corruption of the grave. His Resurrection is the revelation of true and permanent life. It brings to a conclusion the whole plan of God for the world.

The scriptures of the Old Testament teach us the ways of God with the struggling and recalcitrant human race, its highs and lows, its joy in the Lord and its betrayals. We can see ourselves in it at every stage of this history, mirroring our own hopes, promises, failures. But running through it all is the certainty that God will fulfil his promise to Eve to bring good out of evil. So, the Resurrection of Christ is God's acceptance of the loving obedience of his son, expressing and renewing the loving obedience of the human race, which we, unaided, could not provide. By raising Christ to life God shows his final acceptance of Christ's rededication of human loyalty.

Question:

What does it mean to say that you share Christ's risen life?

Second reading:

*The Blood of the Lamb
(1 Peter 1.17-21)*

In the Middle Ages, when ransoming was a current practice for setting captives free, theologians debated to whom the ransom of Christ's blood was paid: was it to God or to the devil? However, the real context of this passage is Old Testament sacrifice, and particularly sacrifice for sin. In these rites, the blood is valuable not for the pain it represents but for life. There can be no reconciliation without blood, according to Leviticus 17.11, for blood represents life. The blood of a living creature belongs to God because it represents the God-given life. Once the blood is shed there is no more life.

So, in Hebrew thought the blood is a cleansing and enlivening agent, renewing life. It takes away and overrides the deadness of sin. The blood of Christ cleanses us, since it represents the divine life which is given to us. So, in the Book of Revelation the garments of the martyrs are washed white (the colour of victory) in the blood of the Lamb, that is, they receive new life.

This also explains the importance of the Eucharistic blood of Christ, which gives us Christ's own divine life and enables us to live with his life.

Question:

Is there any advantage in receiving Communion from the chalice?

Gospel: *The Journey to Emmaus* *(Luke 24.13-35).*

This attractive and delicate story is the story of the journey to faith in the Risen Christ: it occurs in any Christian instruction, and especially in the Eucharist, formed from instruction based on the scriptures, and then brought to its fulfilment in the sacrament.

The two disciples (are they man and woman, as so often in Luke, perhaps Cleopas and his wife?) start off deep in depression and disappointment. But they are open minded and willing to learn as the Stranger explains to them from scripture the meaning of events. Their hearts burn within them at the Stranger's words, but their eyes remain closed. It is only in the sacramental meal that they recognize the Risen Christ.

This is the story of any Christian instruction, culminating in the Eucharist, for the Eucharist is a sacrament of initiation, bringing us to the intimate, personal encounter with Christ.

Once they have been enlightened and have learnt the profound meaning of the events, the truth of the scriptures and the Resurrection, then the disciples return to the Holy City and carry on their own Christian apostolate by spreading the news of the Resurrection. This is the shape of the Christian vocation which we all receive, to assimilate and pass on the meaning of Christ's Resurrection.

Question:

Is the Old Testament a book for Christians?
