

Easter 3 / April 14, 2024

Luke 24:46-47

“Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His name to all nations.”

Repentance and Forgiveness in His Name

Our gospel takes place the evening of the day Jesus rose from the dead. In the early morning, angels told the women who had come to anoint His body, the startlingly good news, “He is not here, but has risen.” As they ran to tell the others, they encountered Jesus Himself, who said, “Greetings! Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me.” Before they went to Galilee, the same day, Jesus encountered two others walking from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. He spoke to their sorrow and explained from the scriptures that the Christ must first suffer, then enter His glory. As He spoke their hearts burned within them. Still, they did not recognize Him. Upon reaching their destination, seeing He meant to travel further, they begged Him to stay the night and have supper with them. When He broke bread at the evening meal, their eyes were opened and they saw it was the Lord.

Jesus makes Himself known to us through the scriptures of both testaments that testify to Him as the God and Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe. Jesus makes Himself known to us in the breaking of the bread in the sacrament of Holy Communion, of which He said, “This is my body given for you... This is my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sin.” He is present to us in our worship and fellowship as baptized believers, of which He said, “Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Jesus is present to the church through word, sacrament and in our worship and fellowship as baptized believers. Jesus is present to the world through the church, His body on earth. Through the body of believers, baptized into His death and resurrection, Jesus calls the world to repentance to receive forgiveness in His Name. The Easter season is about knowing Jesus as our risen Saviour and telling others the good news, so they too may acknowledge their sins, see Jesus their Saviour, receive forgiveness and have life in His name.

As soon as the disciples in Emmaus saw it was Jesus, He vanished from their sight. Whereas they had previously walked from Jerusalem to their village at a leisurely pace, they now run back to Jerusalem to tell the others they had seen the Lord. It is significant that when people saw Jesus, their first reaction was to tell others. Believers tell others about Jesus. Jesus wants us to tell others about repentance and forgiveness in His name. Just as they finished telling the others how Jesus was made known in the breaking of the bread, He suddenly appeared again, saying, “Peace be with you.” Have you ever seen someone who looked so amazed that you thought they must have seen a ghost. The disciples were so amazed Jesus asked, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” Then He said, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” To reinforce His words, He requested food and ate in their presence. He was showing Himself alive through convincing proofs as Luke says, because it was through their witness that others would believe. They would proclaim repentance and forgiveness in His name to all nations.

They would proclaim repentance and forgiveness in His name, not simply by their testimony as eye witnesses to His rising. The most important testimony to Jesus’ resurrection was what they saw in the scriptures. The scriptures make us wise to eternal life by showing us Jesus, our God and Saviour. They would testify to Him as God and our risen Saviour, mostly through their proclamation of the scriptures that said it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and die for our sins. Forgiveness has come to the world through His suffering and death. Eternal life comes to those who believe, through His resurrection. It is for the sake of His death on the cross and resurrection the third day that repentance and forgiveness is proclaimed to the nations and given to all who believe. The disciples and those who would follow them in faith through the ages, would testify to what we all see in the scriptures; that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer these things for our sins and rise for our salvation. Significantly, after opening their eyes to see and offering His body for their hands to touch, Luke says “He opened their minds to understand the scriptures.” When our minds are opened to understand the scriptures, we see Jesus. When their minds were opened to see Him in the scriptures, He sent them to proclaim repentance and forgiveness in His name. When we see Jesus in the scriptures we see Him through faith. When we see Jesus through faith enlightened by the scriptures, and the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we are also able to tell others the good news of His death for our sins and resurrection for our salvation.

It is important to note that Jesus consistently directed the disciples to the scriptures to confirm the necessity of His suffering and death for our sins and to confirm their experience of Him raised for our salvation. He certainly told them to touch Him to confirm what their eyes were seeing, saying “a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” He offered further material evidence by eating a piece of broiled fish in their presence. However, Jesus directed them to His words and the words of the prophets as the most important witness to His resurrection and its meaning for those who believe. He said that everything He experienced was written about by Moses, the prophets and the psalmists. These were necessary for the atonement of human sin, forgiveness and our salvation. Then He opened their minds to understand the scriptures. The Holy Spirit opens our minds to see Jesus through and in the scriptures. Through the scriptures the Holy Spirit leads us to repentance, to see our sins, so we would see Jesus and have forgiveness in His Name. We lead others to see Jesus in the scriptures, for through them repentance and forgiveness is offered to the nations and given to all who believe.

Despite being eyewitnesses, all the evangelists lead us to the scriptures to confirm our faith in Jesus. In our gospel last week Jesus said to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen, yet have believed.” St. John said, “These are written that you may believe Jesus is the Christ the Son of God that believing, you may have life in His name.” The scriptures are the most powerful witness to Him, crucified for our forgiveness and raised for our salvation. For the disciple’s witness to be effective, they had to understand the scriptures. They would testify to Jesus’ death and resurrection through the scriptures. The disciples consistently witnessed to Jesus’ resurrection, not primarily through their experience, but first and foremost through the testimony of the scriptures. Paul encouraged his disciple Timothy to devote himself to the scriptures, for they are able to make us wise unto eternal life through faith in Jesus’ name. It is of first importance for us to continually study the scriptures, ponder their meaning in our hearts, talk about them with one another. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me.” The Holy Spirit through the testimony of the scriptures and the witness of the church proclaims to the world, repentance and forgiveness in Jesus’ Name.

The Easter season is about proclaiming the risen Christ, so that the nations may know Him in repentance as their Saviour, come to Him in faith and have life in His name in time and for eternity. The risen Christ makes Himself known in the world through the witness of the church. The church witnesses to Christ in the world by proclaiming repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name. On the day of Pentecost, the church spoke in the tongues of all the people gathered for the Jewish feast of booths. Peter addressed the crowd that listened in amazement. He told them about Jesus, His suffering and death for our sins and His resurrection for our salvation. That’s the faith of the church and the work of the church on earth. Then he said “Repent and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Three thousand people came to faith, repented, were baptized and received forgiveness in His name. We celebrate Jesus’ resurrection. We remember the witness of the first believers. We share in their faith and in the work the Holy Spirit began through them, proclaiming repentance and forgiveness in Jesus’ Name.

God bless us with His Holy Spirit to open our minds to understand the scriptures, open our hearts to believe and open our lips to share Jesus and the gift of forgiveness and life in His Name with others. Amen