

Third Sunday of Easter – Cycle B
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – April 15, 2018
Reverend Robert W. Marshall, Jr., Pastor

The mother of a teenager once remarked with pleasure that her son had finally memorized a Bible verse – as it happens, one from this very gospel. Each day, it seems, he came home from school and echoed the very words of Jesus: “Do you have anything here to eat?” And while we chuckle at that statement, most of us can still see ourselves in it. No matter where we are going or what we are doing, food is not far from our mind. On vacation, we scout out restaurants that offer the best of the local cuisine. When planning a party, we concern ourselves first and foremost with the menu – whether a multi-course meal or just snacks. When recounting a social event for someone who wasn’t there, we are likely to start by telling them what was being served. We may pride ourselves on leading with our minds or with our hearts, but often we just lead with our stomachs. Where two or three are gathered, to paraphrase St. Matthew’s gospel, there had better be some food.

Though we are in Cycle B of our Sunday readings – a year when most of the gospel passages are taken from Mark’s gospel throughout the year – and from John’s gospel in the Easter season – today we have a “guest star,” so to speak. Our gospel passage is taken from Saint Luke. It begins just after the familiar Emmaus account, when two disciples walked with Jesus for miles, had their hearts burning with his explanation of Scripture, but only recognized him – as they told the Apostles at the beginning of our passage today – only recognized him in the “breaking of bread.” And while they continued their conversation, St. Luke tells us – Jesus appeared in the midst of them. “Peace be with you,” he said to them, but these disciples were anything but peaceful. They were startled and terrified, we are told, and thought they were seeing a ghost. Now, mind you, they had just heard two independent accounts of the resurrection, they had followed Jesus for three years and heard him speak often of his impending death and resurrection – but none of them dared to believe. So Jesus invited them to see his hands and his feet – to see the enduring marks of his crucifixion. This was not some long-lost twin, some ghostly figment of their imagination. Here he was, flesh and blood and wounds and all. St. Luke tells us that after examining his hands and feet, the disciples were incredulous with joy and were amazed. And their incredulity, their amazement might have continued indefinitely, but Jesus knew how to best reveal himself to them – he asked for something to eat.

We hear these resurrection accounts – stories of the disciples giving Jesus something to eat – and we are convinced that this is just one more proof that Jesus offers of the reality of the resurrection. The risen Christ must be flesh and blood,

we reason, because he had something to eat. A spirit, a ghost would not eat. And that is an important aspect to the story of this encounter with the risen Christ. Jesus did need to demonstrate to his incredulous apostles and to future generations – ours included – that his resurrection was real. He needed to show them that he was not pure spirit, but truly God and man, the incarnate Word of God, Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity – just as he was throughout his life on earth. But this post-resurrection account in Luke's gospel, I suggest to you, has a deeper meaning than as forensic evidence on a mythical first century CSI episode.

Jesus appeared to the Apostles in the upper room and gathered with them to eat at table. The last time Jesus had been in that room was on the preceding Thursday evening. He had washed the feet of his disciples and had given them bread which was his body and wine which was his blood of the new covenant. At that gathering – which we call the Last Supper – Jesus established both the ministerial priesthood and the sacrament of the Eucharist. He gave the disciples his sacramental presence as their spiritual and physical nourishment in preparation for the time when he would no longer be with them – at least in the way that he had been for the preceding three years. So when he came back to them, to that upper room, to that table which had become an altar – Jesus returned to his disciples and ate with them. As he had done earlier in the day with the two disciples he met on the road, Jesus revealed himself most perfectly at table – in the breaking of bread, in the sharing of a meal.

If we think back on the events of our lives, indeed, on the events of each day, we will probably be able to identify those times when we were aware of God's presence, when we know that he was with us. Perhaps he filled our hearts with joy or comforted and held us up in times of pain and sorrow. Looking back, we can see the presence of the Lord in our lives. And, if we are candid with ourselves, we may also be able to recognize those times when we missed God, when Jesus might well have been walking with us, when our hearts were burning, and yet his presence was completely hidden from us. In today's gospel we learned that even the Apostles did not easily recognize Jesus, did not immediately accept his resurrection. Their eyes were opened, however, their hearts were filled when Jesus gathered with them at table. And so it is with us. The risen Christ continually beckons us back to this table, to this altar, to this privileged encounter with him. Week after week, day after day, countless times a day in every corner of the globe, Jesus is made present for us in the Eucharist. He reveals himself to us most perfectly here. When we miss Jesus at our workplace or in our home, when we are too busy for him with our hectic schedules or because we think we have better things to do, Jesus beckons us back, invites us to encounter him again – right here, in the breaking of bread, in the celebration of the Eucharist, gathered with him at table in this upper room.