

Alleluia Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, alleluia!

It's good to proclaim that the Lord is risen, isn't it? When we say these words, when we mean what we say, deep joy and peace irradiate our hearts. We rejoice, and for some time, we feel so good, we feel so sure. We know it is true. But soon enough, we go back to our normal lives, we are confronted with our daily problems and struggles, and the peace and joy we have experienced about Jesus' resurrection begin to fade and eventually disappear. When we listen to the news or read the newspaper, we are bombarded with bad news. We hear about violence, about shootings of innocent people, about injustice, about pain and suffering in addition to our own personal problems, and the joy and peace of the resurrection sometimes looks like a good but irrelevant memory. Sometimes we might even wonder if that makes any sense, doubt begins to invade our heart and mind. We would like to be sure, we would like to have a definitive answer, we would like to have proof, we are looking for certainty, and we might never find the answers we are looking for, because the resurrection is about faith, a faith rooted in the witnessing of the first disciples, a faith proclaimed from generation to generation by people who, in turn, have believed in the witnessing of the first disciples, and have experienced in their lives the presence of the risen Lord.

Faith and doubt are very close to each other, indeed. This is what we can see in the Gospel for today. The disciples were in the presence of the risen Lord, but they did not feel peace, nor joy at first, only fear. They thought they saw a ghost, so they were terrified. They knew though that their beloved master was risen, but they did not really get it. They knew, because this episode took place late on Easter day. Just before Jesus appeared among the disciples and scared them to death, the disciples were rejoicing. Two of them just came back in a rush from their trip toward Emmaus because when the stranger who travelled with them for a while broke the bread, they recognized it was Jesus who immediately disappeared. All their doubts, and fears, were gone. Only joy and peace were in their hearts. They could not wait to share this good news with their friends in Jerusalem. But when they arrived they did not have the chance to open their mouth, they were greeted by a joyful: It's true he is risen, he appeared to Simon! And then they could share their own story. So, it's really easy to imagine in what kind of mood they all were: excited, joyful, incredibly happy by the resurrection of Jesus.

But that did not last! Confronted with what they thought was a ghost, all the joy and certainties were gone. They wanted it to be true, but then they were not sure anymore. Jesus will give them a sign, the joy came back, but doubt, disbelief was still present. It took them some time to realize that Jesus was really among them. So, if it was so difficult for the disciples, who had the privilege to see with their eyes and to touch Jesus' body, to believe in the resurrection, how more difficult it is for us who came to believe so long after the facts.

But today, as yesterday, as 2000 years ago, the only proof we have of the resurrection is the testimony of the first witnesses after they understood what the Risen Lord told them. Namely that the books of Moses, the prophets and the psalms foretold that the Messiah will suffer, die and rise again on the third day. It's good for us to be reminded that the first place to find and know Jesus is through the Scriptures read, digested, and prayed. Still today the Lord, the Word of life, is talking to us from the written word who became alive as we read it, study it, pray with it, and meditate about it. We can not not read the Bible. The Old and New Testament are so important to inform our faith and to understand how Jesus came to fulfill the promises of what we call now the Old Testament. The bible is not reserved to a selected group of scholars and theologians, the Bible is the Word of God for all of God's people. This is why when the 1st Book of Common Prayer was written, Archbishop Crammer prepared a daily lectionary to be sure that the anglican, lays and clergy, would read the entire Bible in a year in their own language. It's why all Christian denominations have developed lectionaries for Sundays and

weekdays. We never know when the written Word of God will become alive for us. I still remember to this day how verse 7 from Psalm 4 one day was the exact word that I needed to hear, a private message from the Lord to me, *You have put gladness in my heart, more than when grain and wine and oil increase.*

However, we can read the Scriptures as often as we want, we can study them to understand their deep meaning, we can even learn some verses by heart, this is not going to help us as long as we are not opened to receiving the help of the Lord, as long as we are not willing to follow the lead of the Spirit. The disciples were all devout Jews, they followed the Law, they read the Torah, they heard Jesus' teaching, still they could not understand by themselves how the books of Moses, the Prophets and the psalms were related to Jesus. Luke gives us two instances on Easter day when Jesus had to explain to the disciples how the Bible was about him and his mission. We know that the disciples of Emmaus realized that their hearts were burning when he was explaining the scriptures to them. Later the same evening, Jesus had to open their minds to understand the scriptures.

At the same time the risen Lord opened their hearts to the Scriptures, they were sent on a mission. *"Thus it is written that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.* The Good News, the Gospel, the message to be proclaimed is twofold. First, Christians have to proclaim that according to the Scriptures the Messiah suffered and rose from the dead on the third day. Second they have to proclaim a call for repentance and forgiveness of sins in the name of Jesus to all nations. This is the heart of the Gospel: through Jesus forgiveness of sins is offered to all who turn to Him, no questions asked! This is exactly what Peter did in the first reading when he told the people of Jerusalem: *In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.* Repent and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, that is as simple and as powerful as that!

At the beginning of this sermon I said about the resurrection that sometimes we would like to be sure, we would like to have a definitive answer, we would like to have proof. First, we need to open our Bible and invite the Spirit to help us. We also need to find ways to be connected to the Lord through personal prayer in order to have an intimate relationship with the Risen Lord. Because, being a Christian is not about intellectual knowledge, it's about a special relationship with the risen Lord. Being a Christian, a follower of Christ, is not about intellectual knowledge, it is about a knowledge from the heart.. Being a Christian is not about intellectual knowledge, it is about love in action and faith in the Lord based on the testimony of the first witnesses. Being a Christian is always a journey with ups and downs, but with the firm assurance that no matter what is going on in the world and in our lives, the Lord is risen, active, and present at our sides in good and bad times alike.

Today we are the ones that the Lord is sending in this area with all our brothers and sisters from all denominations to preach that the Lord is risen and that forgiveness is freely offered to all. All of us, because we belong to Christ are already children of God, to use John's words. As children of God, children of the light, children of the one who is the author of life, we are called to go boldly into the world and proclaim by our lives that the lord is risen, and that he is offering his new life to all.

Spirit of the Risen Lord open the eyes of our faith that we may believe. Spirit of the Risen Lord open the eyes of our hearts that we may see Christ's presence around us. Spirit of the Risen Lord help us to proclaim with all our strength that Alleluia Christ is risen!