

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER—2024

A little girl asked her mother, “Mom, how did the human race appear?” The mother answered, “Well, first God made Adam and Eve and then they had children, and so on, and so on.” Two days later the girl asked her father the same question. The father answered, “The human race evolved from lower forms, taking many millions of years. Finally, many years ago there were monkeys from which the human race evolved.” The confused girl returned to her mother and said, “Mom, how is it possible that you told me the human race was created by God, and Dad said we developed from monkeys?” The mother answered, “Well, dear, it is very simple. I told you about my side of the family and your father told you about his.”

What does it really mean to believe in the Resurrection? What are the consequences of that belief? How does it impact our lives as individuals and as members of families and communities? In last week’s first reading, we heard how it moved the members of the early Christian community to live as one, united in mind and in heart, sharing what they had with others in such a way that they gave a powerful witness to the reality that Jesus was still in their midst and working with them. In the life of the disciples it allowed them and empowered them to move beyond their fears and become those bold proclaimers of the Good News. We see that very clearly in today’s first reading. Peter hits his listeners right between the eyes as he reminds them that they handed Jesus over, that they denied the Holy and Righteous One, and that they put the author of life to death. He says that they did it out of ignorance. The remedy—Own up to what you did, be sorry, promise to try and do better, and your sins will be forgiven. In other words, change your attitude and your way of behaving and you too will be given a second chance.

Now remember this is coming from Peter who not too long ago denied that he even knew Jesus and the fact that he was one of his disciples. He did this not even 24 hours after he had sat with Jesus at the Last Supper, had Jesus wash his feet and receive from Jesus the gift of his Body and Blood and the promise that he would be with them always. We can be sure that Peter was very mindful of what he did and that when he was speaking to the people in this way, he was not condemning them. He wanted to share with them his experience of being forgiven and what that meant for him, which was basically that Peter got a second chance. We remember that when Peter realized what he had done wrong, even though it was done out of fear, he was crushed and he wept bitterly. However, Jesus gave him a chance to redeem himself when he asked Peter three times, “Do you love me?” giving Peter the opportunity to respond three times, “Yes, Lord, you know I do.” Because of this, the people would be able to identify with Peter who was a sinner, who recognized his sin, but turned to Jesus for that life-giving forgiveness that wipes away sin and allows one to begin again.

Peter’s message came from his very profound and personal experience. This was true not just for Peter but for all of the disciples who abandoned Jesus. They knew that they themselves had been the first

beneficiaries of the message they were to proclaim to others. All that had they had done and whatever passed before—their betrayal and abandoning of Jesus in his suffering and greatest time of need—all that had been forgiven by Jesus and confirmed when they heard him say to them, as we heard in last week's Gospel, "Peace be to you."

And so, what does it mean to believe in the Resurrection? It means that no matter what happens, each of us can start all over again. All of us are given a second chance and, when you really think of it, not only a second chance, but also a third, a fourth, and so on, as long as we stay on that road of always trying to do our best. God constantly offers us his forgiveness for our faults, failings and sins. He doesn't hold over our heads the times that we have acted out of fear or the times that we have acted out of ignorance or even when we have acted out of jealousy, envy, selfishness or resentment. We know that to receive that forgiveness makes us feel very good; it is so refreshing, renewing and uplifting. Seeking this forgiveness is what it means to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus, in other words, that he is still with us. For me, receiving this forgiveness is one of the most powerful signs that Jesus really is with us, alive and well and still very interested in our happiness and peace.

And, as the disciples, we now, the forgiven, are called to be ambassadors and proclaimers of that forgiveness. And, as we know, the most powerful preaching is done not so much by words, but through our example of giving others the opportunity to begin again and start over. Someone said, "People don't get to meet the forgiving God that Jesus preached about by the water cooler at work. But they do get to meet us there. The words we speak and the way we act will put a face on God for them and they will come to know that the divine face is open to anyone seeking forgiveness. But they must first meet that forgiveness through us, and if they do, they will come to know that there is another way to travel the road of life--other than aggression, violence, lies, greed, lust, anger and revenge. Thus, people will encounter God's healing and forgiveness in us.

Finally, this being able to start over again is true not just in the area of forgiveness but in all areas of our lives. This is what gives us hope and optimism even when things get really bad. There will always be a next step even if we have to change directions. The only way we can't start over again is if we give up and isolate ourselves from God and others. As a reminder, to close I will share with you the entire speech that Winston Churchill offered to the students of Harrow School in 1941: "Never, ever, ever give up. Never give up." So, let's follow his advice and may we never give up, so that the joy, peace and the promise of Easter may always remain in our hearts.