

APRIL 15, 2018

Third Sunday of Easter

Reading 1 [ACTS 3:13-15, 17-19](#)

Responsorial Psalm [PS 4:2, 4, 7-8, 9](#)

R. (7a) Lord, let your face shine on us.

Reading 2 [1 JN 2:1-5A](#)

Gospel [LK 24:35-48](#)

The two disciples recounted what had taken place on the way, and how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of bread. While they were still speaking about this, he stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." But they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Then he said to them, "Why are you troubled? And why do questions arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see I have." And as he said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While they were still incredulous for joy and were amazed, he asked them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of baked fish; he took it and ate it in front of them. He said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them, "Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things."

HOMILY:

Now that we are two weeks down the line from Easter, and most of the chocolate Easter eggs are gone, the left-over ham has made as many sandwiches as is safe, and the Easter bunnies have gone into their reverse hibernation, waiting out summer and fall until they reappear next April 21st, it is fitting, with some distance and perspective to ask, what happened? Or, more specifically, **“What is the true meaning of Easter?”**

The TV host Jimmy Kimmel took a camera out into the streets of Los Angeles to ask children, “What happened to Jesus on Easter?” The various answers given: “He made a bunny.” “The bad guys killed him. He got pinned to a cross.” “He was in heaven, working on his project, and then he came down to see his bunny. His project was on a computer.” “He came back and gave the people Easter Eggs.” “He rose and said, ‘Bunny, please don’t hide the Easter Eggs.’” All I can say is, “Cute . . . but incorrect!”

To shed some light on the true meaning of Easter which, during 50 days after Easter up until Pentecost we celebrate with an increased intensity, I would like to go back to an Easter, 23 years ago, in 1995. In the weeks leading up to Easter, in the same hospital in Michigan that I was born, my grandmother’s life was coming close to its end.

My grandma Pauline Bullock—what to say about her? *How much time do we have?* She was certainly one of the most fascinating, perplexing members of the Bullock clan! She was born, not in Michigan, but in maritime provinces of Canada, in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, on August 29, 1916. It was there that she met her future husband, Alexander Bullock Jr., who had emigrated from Edinburgh Scotland, and who, after their marriage, settled with his wife in the Detroit, Michigan area. My memories of grandma are dominated by her being a “plain-spoken” woman who certainly spoke her mind. For example, I remember her speaking to me as a teenager about her “problems” with the Bible, which she told me, with some frustration, was filled with “some of the most violent stories imaginable.” This skepticism matched her lack of a practice of any organized religion. In fact, there was no religion in my father’s upbringing, until my father was baptized just prior to his marrying my mother. The longer I lived and the more important my faith became to me, the more I discovered how critical she could be about Catholicism *specifically*. She spoke with some disdain about the practices of our wonderful faith! Imagine that—we’ve got critics!

One of the last conversations I recall having with her was in her small home on North Wilson Ave., just off of 12 Mile Road, in Royal Oak MI. I had just dropped the bombshell on my family (and, as it turned out, on me!) that I was leaving engineering and entering the seminary. When I went to visit her soon after, and expecting the worst, instead she beautifully said, “Well, if I’m going to have a grandson as a priest, I probably should learn more about Catholicism!” That was a surprise! But, there were more surprises to come!

It was my aunt who took up most of the watch with my grandma in her final days in the hospital. As “plain-spoken” as my grandma, when I spoke to her later, my aunt said that grandma was simply a most disagreeable patient. As Grandma’s death approached, the next surprise: this seemingly un-religious woman asked my aunt if she could arrange a visit with the hospital chaplain—and she specified which one: she wanted the Catholic priest! When I heard this, I thought, “she’s learned more about Catholicism than I thought!” What she and the priest shared with one another is known only to them and God—but apparently it brought her some peace and she died soon after. There were no religious observances for her funeral and in many ways this seemed the end of the story . . . until . . . Several weeks later, my aunt was cleaning out some papers from my Grandma’s house. Among her things was found this half sheet, slightly browned certificate, a *baptismal certificate*, establishing that on the 9th day of September, 1916, eleven days after her birth, Dorothy Pauline Bailey, later my grandmother, was baptized in St. Ambrose Catholic Church in Yarmouth NS. . . Which helped explain that, near the end of Lent, nearly 80 years later, as Easter approached, for my grandmother, the meaning of Easter was a rescue—a saving—as her adoption as a daughter of God was restored through the sacraments of the church into which she had been baptized some eight decades before, and after a long period of seeming inactivity of her faith and she was restored to grace.

What is the meaning of Easter? Of course, it is about the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, who rose from the dead some 20 centuries ago. But, what that meant to my Grandmother, and what it means to each of us, is that the resurrection is repeated in the lives of each of us, sacramentally in the waters of baptism, where, as St. Paul reminds us, we are buried with Christ in the death of baptism so that we can rise—be rescued—from that death in the power of Christ’s resurrection.

In today’s gospel, presented to us two weeks after the commemoration of Easter, we can see how the early disciples, who visited by the Risen Lord, begin to discover what this rising meant for them. And what it meant for them was a rescue: a rescue for the power of sin and death. There, from the Gospel of Luke, we hear Jesus explaining the meaning of the resurrection, as it was told in the Scriptures: “Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said to them, ‘Thus it is written that the Christ would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations.’” In a nutshell, Jesus’ death and resurrection meant that we could receive the salvation that comes from forgiveness of sins, that the effect of sin, death, no longer had power over them—or us.

So . . . as we continue our 50-day celebration of Easter, what is the meaning of Easter? Notwithstanding the ever-present candy and the Easter Bunny, the meaning of Easter is a rescue—a rescue from death, and not just for Jesus, but for all who have been joined to him in the saving powers of baptism. For this is what Jesus promised. For my grandmother, she had a vivid experience of this rescue in the last days of her life, for which I am grateful.

But there is no need to wait until then! Let’s begin living full, resurrected life now—for Easter, the rescue of God, is waiting for us right here, each time we touch the resurrected flesh of Jesus in the Eucharist we are about to share. All we have to do is keep coming to the “rescue of God,” the resurrected Lord who, in his great mercy, comes to us in the resurrection, saves us from death and restores our lives—right now and always. That’s the meaning of Easter.