

homily 3 Easter B 2018 Luke 24: 35-48

If I was to ask you right now if you are afraid the vast majority sitting here would respond with “NO. That’s a ridiculous question, Father Michael!!! Afraid? No. I am sitting with family and friends in the comfort of my neighborhood church. Of course I am not afraid.”

I would propose that we might not be conscious of fear because we are doing a good job of managing it. It is kind of like the person in chronic pain. They live with pain every moment of their lives. They try to diminish the experience of pain by taking all sorts of medications. Sometimes there are things that engage them to the point they actually “forget” the pain. There may be times when they might not be “conscious” of pain, but, by definition chronic pain is pain that is always there. Every moment this insidious force wears down the immune system, weakens defenses, robs one of joy and peace, diminishes the experience of life itself.

I believe that we may not always be conscious of fear but just like the person in chronic pain everything in our lives suggests its presence. You and I live with fear every moment, every hour, every day. We work very hard at keeping fear out of our consciousness but that doesn’t mean it isn’t there.

Allow me to offer you some evidence that fear is an integral part of your every day life. Do you lock your doors and windows at night? I remember growing up in the city of Scranton. My family was not alone in leaving the front and back doors of the house wide open during the summer with only the screen door closed to allow some cool air to flow through the house. Today we not only lock the doors but also the windows both summer and winter. Many of us have home security systems with remote cameras and outdoor motion detector lights. We are afraid.

Years ago every kid walked to and from school sometimes several miles. No parent with an ounce of responsibility would allow that today? Fear. In the past few thought about health insurance. If someone became sick you simply made payments on the medical bill. Today we panic without health insurance. One trip to the emergency room could bankrupt most families. Fear.

I know someone who had a special insurance policy for cancer. There are insurance policies to pay for a nursing homes, a house fire, someone falling on the ice and floods. Fear. Kids starting out today in their early 20s are concerned about pension plans. Why are young people worried about retiring? Fear. The stock market goes through sweeps of 700 points a day. Fear. People are talking about putting a wall up on our border with Mexico. Fear. In this modern day when invasion from another country is unimaginable more and more people feel a need to have a loaded gun at their fingertips. Fear.

You and I might not always be conscious of our fear but fear is part of our existence. It is always there. It wears down our immune systems, diminishes our ability to feel joy, shadows what we perceive, weighs down our hearts with anxiety and fear makes it almost impossible to experience the risen Christ.

Why am I trying to convince everyone that fear is an operational factor in our lives every moment of every day? It was fear which kept the disciples from experiencing Jesus. We want to experience Jesus. Fear is standing in our way.

It has long been debated as to why the followers of Jesus had a problem recognizing Him once he returned from the grave. Mary Magdalene thinks she is speaking to a

gardener. The men on the road to Emmaus, disciples of Christ, think him a stranger. Jesus needs to identify himself once he reappears to his close friends, the apostles. It is suggested that the post-resurrection Christ looked “different”. Perhaps this is true, but, there is one factor which seems even clearer, that is, fear precludes and experience of the resurrected Christ. Let’s take a look at our Gospel today Luke 24: 35-48 and see what we can learn. The first verses reference the two men who walk with Christ on the road to Emmaus without recognizing him. The conversation concerns the events of the Passion. These disciples are leaving Jerusalem not waiting for a resurrection! Why? Fear!

Notice that a process begins once these disciples meet the stranger, Jesus. The stranger opens their minds to the scripture, engages their attention, draws them into himself, and eventually sits with them to share bread. The movement from fear to faith is not instantaneous. It is a process that leads these disciples from the state of fear to the comfort of a candle lit table, the warmth of friendship and eventually to a place where they are at peace and therein disposed to experience the Risen Christ in the breaking of the bread. My point---the two men could not experience Christ in His full reality until fear was extinguished. You and I cannot experience Christ in His full reality until we deal with fear.

After Christ’s revelation in the breaking of bread, the two men return to the circle of disciples hiding away in Jerusalem. The doors are locked where they were. Fear. Jesus appears. Now terror! The disciples think they were seeing a ghost. But note once again that a process has begun which slowly diminishes fear to the point wherein the disciples are disposed to experience the Risen Christ. The human body and the psyche do not move from one state of being to another instantaneously. Jesus has to nurture the move. Jesus begins the process by speaking words of reassurance to his friends. *“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 and you can see I have.”* The disciples need time to adjust to this new reality. One can imagine Jesus moving up close to each of them so they can touch him. It is still not enough. *“Have you anything here to eat?”* he asks. They need even more proof. A few moments pass while one of them finds the baked fish and extends it toward Christ. He takes it between his fingers and slowly feeds himself. They watch. They need more time. Fear is a fierce enemy. Jesus calls on them to reflect on scripture passages. *“Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.”*

There is no immediate jolt from fear to belief with Jesus appearance. It takes time to move into a place of peace. We do not get to this place on our own. Jesus appears to each of us with not only an invitation but with his assistance to move beyond fear. The invitation begins a process to which we must be committed, steady, disciplined, and persistent. Fear is a noisy street. Peace is a quiet table. Fear is a prescription for flight. Fear constricts one’s attention it does not open one’s heart.

Given what I said so far let me try to summarize the message of today’s Gospel.

We all believe in Jesus, but many of us know that we are missing something. We have heard some tell of an experience of the Risen Christ that is so real, so powerful, so shattering that it qualifies one as a witness just like the original disciples. We want to experience Christ in this life changing manner. We know in our hearts we are missing something.

This Gospel suggests that it is fear that is keeping this experience at bay. First piece of advise---stay with it. Do not be discouraged. Do not believe that the original disciples alone are privy to this wonderful experience of the Risen Lord. The disciples stayed in

Jerusalem until they saw Jesus. You and I must stay in communion with other followers of Jesus to experience Christ.

Second, open the scripture and read. Take your time. "Faith comes from hearing." Listen to the voice of Jesus as He speaks to your heart from the Gospels. It is amazing how you can read the same story many times and then this sudden "a ha experience". A connection is made. It makes sense. something happens and you see.

And lastly, Christ made a promise never to leave you. Keep in mind that you are not waiting for Christ. Jesus has returned and is standing at your side. Stay with Him. The journey from the streets of fear to the quiet table of peace is sure to end with an experience of the Risen Christ. "*... you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you*" John 14:20.

Amen.