

Third Sunday of Easter
April 30, 2017, Year A
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“Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way, and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread.”

What had taken place on the way to Emmaus? Jesus had walked along with them and opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. They recognized him in the Old Testament prophecies. Then, repeating the words and gestures of the Last Supper --” he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them” – they recognized him with them at the table. Then he vanished, leaving them to recognize him in the bread. The Church sees a connection between the resurrection of Christ and his presence in the Eucharist because Christ himself made the connection.

We understand this if we understand the Scriptures, which we can only do if we read the Scriptures with the Church, making full use of our 2,000 year long Spirit-guided meditation on the meaning of the Scriptures. So, buy a Bible with good footnotes and commentaries, but know what you are buying.

There's been a lot of useful research into the history, languages, culture, geography, and politics of the Biblical world. But there has crept into modern scholarship a bias against the supernatural. For instance, the Introduction to the Gospel of Luke in my Catholic New American Bible reports that most scholars believe Luke was written after 70AD because in Luke Jesus predicts the destruction of Jerusalem, which didn't happen until 70AD. Okay, it's fair enough to report the opinions of scholars, but what a bias those scholars have, that Jesus could not have known beforehand that Jerusalem would be destroyed, and that the evangelist put words into his mouth after the fact.

One modern translation I recommend is the Ignatius Study Bible. The footnotes are by solid Catholic scholars free of modernist bias. Another, that I may or may not recommend, is the ESV, the English Standard Version, Study Edition. I call it ESV-- Evangelical Study Version, because the commentators are all committed to the faith alone principles of the Protestant Reformation. I had no idea the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary graduated so many Ph.D.'s! So, that's okay, as long as you know what you're getting. I guess you should not be surprised that a scholar's interpretation might reflect his theological commitments. But I did come across some footnotes in the ESV that did surprise me. Like a detective following footprints in the snow, let's follow these footnotes and see where they lead!

Under the passage in John's Gospel where Peter and John look at the burial cloths left behind in the empty tomb, the footnote says:

“Nothing in the text indicates that Jesus' body passed through the cloths, or that the cloths were lying in the shape of Jesus' body. The New Testament elsewhere affirms the real physical materiality of Jesus' resurrection body. Most likely Jesus unwrapped these cloths from his body when he awakened from death and left them behind.” (JN 20:6)

Combine this with the footnote explaining how Jesus could have entered the room where his disciples were hiding even though the doors were locked:

“Since Jesus clearly had a real physical body with flesh and bone after he rose from the dead, one possibility is that the door was miraculously opened so that the physical body of Jesus could enter.”
(Jn. 20:19)

What astounds me about these comments is that they imagine the resurrection of Jesus to be merely a return to the physical, bodily life such as we have, bound by time and space and all the conventional laws of nature. He had to be unwrapped. I don't know how a merely physical Jesus managed this on his own. When Lazarus was raised from the dead, Jesus had to tell the onlookers to untie him and let him go. Maybe the angel who came down unwrapped him, and then rolled back the stone so he could get out of the tomb. Are we really to suppose that Jesus, who even before his death and resurrection could walk on the water, had to open the door to get into the upper room?

I suppose the commentator wants to emphasize the reality of Jesus resurrection, but why this narrow understanding of the nature of the resurrection body? I may have stumbled upon a clue in the Gospel of John, chapter six, where Jesus says, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.” (Jn. 6:53) The ESV footnote says:

“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood cannot be intended literally, for no one ever did that.” Ah... now I see. Jesus' risen body was a real physical body, just like ours, and so to eat it would be cannibalism, and his body would have been all eaten up a long time ago. Therefore the Eucharist is not really the body of Christ. It is only symbolic.

Well, there is a valid point here. Receiving communion is not an act of cannibalism. The consecrated host is not a piece of flesh out of his arm or leg. But that doesn't mean the Eucharist is only symbolic. It is the real presence of his risen body, which has been transformed into a new manner of existing by the resurrection. As Gregory the Great said, “His body after his resurrection was of the same nature as ours, but of a different sort of glory.” (Forty Gospel Homilies 26)

And as St. Jerome said, “The substance of our resurrection bodies will certainly be the same as now, though of higher glory.” (Against Jovinianus I.36)

A different sort of glory. A higher glory. What do they mean by glory? Power. Manner of

existence. Someone acquainted with modern physics might say that the resurrection body exists at a higher energy level. Someone familiar with quantum physics might say, "Heck, anything's possible!"

The resurrection raised the body of Jesus, but more, it changed it, bumped it up to the infinitely higher energy level of God. It could pass through linen, pass through locked doors, appear and disappear, be present whenever and wherever he wished, even in all the tabernacles of the world, under the appearance of bread and wine, even the smallest particle-- his true body that hung on the cross, but as it now exists, in a glorified high-energy state, in which all things are possible.