

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

This is the Third Sunday of Easter, but it's still the day of Jesus' resurrection in our Gospel. In the past two weeks, we have heard how the women went to the tomb, found the stone rolled away, looked in to find Jesus' body missing, and had the Good News proclaimed to them: "*You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has risen; he is not here*" (Mark 16:6). We heard how the risen Jesus showed Himself to the quaking disciples on the same evening and calmed their fears, and again a week later with Thomas.

Today, we have Luke's accounting of that same resurrection evening appearance of the Lord. To be sure, Luke recounts different details, and those different details give the account authenticity. For example, there's no mention of the locked doors. Also, the disciples were busy discussing an earlier event when Jesus came and stood among them. That earlier event had Jesus hiding his identity to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, but finally making Himself known "*in the breaking of the bread*" (Luke 24:35).

But in both Luke and John, Jesus stands suddenly in the midst of the disciples and proclaims "*peace*" to them. In both, Jesus shows the disciples the wounds in His hands and feet. The wounds make it clear. This is no imposter. "*[I]t is I myself,*" Jesus Christ, the Crucified. More than that, this is Jesus Christ in the flesh. He is no mere ghost, as the disciples at first thought. "*Touch me, and see,*" He invites them. "*For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.*"

The disciples started to understand, and joy began to well up in them ... but still they disbelieved. Therefore, Jesus had another proof to set before them. "*Have you anything here to eat?*" Jesus asks, after all spirits don't eat; they have no need of food. Besides, food would pass through a spirit as through air. But for Jesus, "*They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate before them.*" Jesus made it clear: He rose bodily, physically, from the dead. That's what these texts say; that's what we confess in our creeds and confessions.

What then is all the modern talk about a spiritual resurrection from the dead. (I'm not sure exactly what they mean by that.) They mean, I surmise, that all that "rose from the dead" was a spirit, that, in fact, all the disciples saw was a spirit (directly contradicting Jesus). That makes absolutely no sense to me. Spirits don't die in death. Rather the spirit departs from the body in death. That's what happened when Jesus died. He said, "*Father, into your hands I commit my spirit*" (Luke 23:46). That's what happens when we die. The spirit (or the soul) separates from the body, the soul of the believer ascending to heaven while the body sleeps and, for most of us, returns to dust as God had said — "*you are dust, and to dust you shall return*" (Gen. 3:19) — while both soul and body await the resurrection of the body from the dead.

Why do they want to proclaim only a spiritual resurrection? Is there anything to it? After all, they might quote St. Peter who says that Jesus was “*put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit*” (1 Pet. 3:18) — doesn’t that sound like a “spiritual resurrection”? No! It does not say that. Rather, R. C. H. Lenski makes the case (*Commentary of the New Testament: 1-2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude*, p. 155ff, esp. p. 158), that the two words that get translated “in the flesh” and “in the spirit” are “datives of means.” Jesus was put to death by means of the flesh, for He was of the flesh — He had a body — and fleshly men hanged Him on a tree. And Jesus’ body was brought back to life by means of the spirit — His spirit reanimated His lifeless body, and He came forth from the tomb, fully human again, body and soul, body and spirit.

So, too, St. Paul talks about being “*raised a spiritual body*” (1 Cor. 15:44). But, even there it’s clear that the Apostle is not talking about simply spirit, but a “*spiritual body*,” a body no longer fettered with the sinful weaknesses of the flesh, no longer fettered with corruption and mortality. Exactly! Jesus is raised bodily from the dead, and His spirit that reanimated His body has become “*life giving*” (1 Cor. 15:45). He is the first fruits; we follow Him in resurrection victory, such that, as we are raised from the dead, our “*perishable body [puts] on the imperishable, and [our] mortal body [puts] on immortality*” (1 Cor. 15:55). The Scripture is no help to these errorists.

Why only a spiritual resurrection? You may think the error is new; it is not. It’s almost as old as the church, and this error pits the spirit against the flesh ... spirit good; flesh bad. But that’s contrary to what God said on the sixth day, after man’s creation: “*behold, it was very good*” (Gen. 1:31). Somehow this false dualism gets recycled in the church and starts to trouble her again.

And surely Jesus did say: “*It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life*” (John 6:63). And He said, “*The spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak*” (Mark 14:38). Again, “*true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...*” (John 4:23). But none of these suggests that the flesh is worthless trash, something to be discarded in death.

Dear friends, had God wanted us to be merely a bunch of disembodied spirits, He would have created us that way. But we are not simply spirits. God the Father created our bodies; God the Son by His death and resurrection redeemed our bodies; and God the Holy Spirit sanctifies our bodies to be His temple. Our bodies, with flesh and bone, along with our spirits, the breath of life, breathed into us, make us the persons we are.

Surely, we pray that “when our last hour comes, [God would] give us a blessed end, and graciously take us from this valley of sorrow to Himself in heaven” (Small Catechism, Lord’s Prayer, Seventh Petition). It’s surely true that “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*,” as St. Paul says in Philippians (1:21). But the

promise of the resurrection is not an eternal wispy existence as a spirit, but instead: *“after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another”* (Job 19:26-27). It's a flesh and bones eternity with a glorified body (Phil. 3:21) and heavenly feasting with rich food and well-aged wines (Is. 25:6). May that be our hope for eternity.

But, until that great and glorious day when Christ comes again to raise up all the dead, let us live as Christians, in repentance and faith, trusting that our *“sins [have been] blotted out”* by the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ, and looking forward to the *“times of refreshing [that will] come from the presence of the Lord.”* For *“what we will be has not yet appeared.”* But we do know this, *“that when he appears,”* we shall be raised up to *“be like him,”* and we *“shall see him as he is.”*

Yes, let us live as Christians now, reveling in the victory that is ours in Christ Jesus, hearing the great stories of cross and resurrection, singing our hymns of praise to the Crucified and Risen One, and eating the rich meal of forgiveness, life, and salvation served here, that we may be built up, body and soul, in our faith, that we may live lives worthy of the name of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Christ is risen! Alleluia!