

Bishop's Reflection – Third Sunday Easter

In today's Gospel, the disciples believe they are seeing a ghost. Usually when we speak of ghosts, we speak of preternatural beings who cannot find their rest. Their restlessness is often caused by the nature of their death, a death that is quite unsettling. When the disciples believe they are seeing a ghost, they are probably not thinking in the lines of Caspar the Friendly Ghost. They may even be wondering if Jesus' appearing to them, in ghostly form, may be associated with the way they abandoned him and left him alone to die.

It is important to note that Jesus does not come in retribution, to punish them for their failings. Instead, Jesus brings a message of peace and speaks about reconciliation and healing, instructing them, "That repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations beginning from Jerusalem.". Later on, the Apostles share this same message with the people of Jerusalem, saying, "You killed the author of life, whom God raised from the dead," immediately adding, "I know you acted in ignorance and so did your rulers," directing them to, "Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out." Just as the Apostles experience the forgiveness of sins firsthand, so they become witnesses to this gift in sharing it with the people to whom they are sent.

At times, the Church has become better at identifying people's sins than in bringing the message of reconciliation to the world. Too often, in listening to those who are sent out to preach, the Church gives the impression that "the world is going to hell in a handbasket". Consequently, the world has grown tired of listening to the voice of the Church. And why blame them? Aren't we all a bit tired of the negative messaging that comes at us from all directions? Some have begun to despair that forgiveness is even possible. Others are sick and tired of having to turn the other cheek in their pursuit for justice. Even so, the world is in desperate need of Jesus' gift of forgiveness and healing. We are called to mediate his gift in all that we say and do.

"You are witnesses of these things." If it is true that we have experienced the power of Christ's forgiveness in our lives, and we cannot assume that it is, then Christ calls us to share this gift through the rich variety of means that are available to us, and in the way we live out his gift of reconciliation and mercy as families, parishes and civic communities. May we who long for the forgiveness that comes from God be channels of that forgiveness. May we who ask God to "Forgive us our trespasses", be equally willing to "Forgive those who trespass against us."