



Family Connections

Third Sunday of Easter – Year B



Luke 24: 35 – 48

The two disciples told the eleven and their companions what had happened on the road to Emmaus, and how Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.”

And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.

Then 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, the Prophets, and the 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 is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”



Reflection:

It takes a lot to be a good witness, as we see in today’s Gospel. Not only do we have to remember what we saw, the details and the order in which they took place, but we need to be sure of what we saw, and not cast doubt on it. As we come to know God in our lives, there comes a time when we are asked to tell how we have seen God’s presence in our lives. Some of the things we have seen may seem small and insignificant but, when we look at all the stories together, we might be quite surprised. God’s presence in our lives is more real than we might first think.



Table Discussion (at mealtime):

Take some time to share why you believe in God. “What evidence do you draw on the most?”



Toby's Granny (a bedtime story):

"They sure had a hard time believing that Jesus had risen from the dead," Toby said after Mom read him a story of Jesus appearing to his disciples after he rose from the dead. "You would think they would be happy and overjoyed. Instead, they were terrified and slow to believe."

"Try to put yourself in their shoes," his Mom answered. "People don't rise from the dead every day."

"All I know is that if Grandpa ever came back to visit Granny, I'm sure she wouldn't mind it one bit. It sure would put a smile back on her face."

"Do you think so?" Mom asked. "I think she would be quite surprised."

"Doesn't she believe that Grandpa is alive with Jesus? Doesn't she believe that Jesus can do all things?"

"I'm sure she does. But I also think that she is not expecting to see him again before she dies; only then will they be together again, forever."

"Do you think it's possible that he can come back, even for a short visit?" Toby asked.

"Of course, I think it's possible; but I would be surprised if he did."

"I know what I would do if he did." Toby said proudly.

"What's that?" Mom asked.

"I would give him a hug, and tell him I miss him. I would tell him how much Granny cried."

"I'm sure you would," Mom bent over and kissed him on the forehead. "We all miss him. I think God knows that. I think Grandpa knows that, too."

"Do you think Grandpa can hear us? Do you think he's listening to us now?"

"He might be; I don't know. But, if he is not, I'm sure Jesus will pass the message on to him. I'm sure Jesus will let him know."

"Do you think he'll do that?" Toby asked.

"I'm sure he will." Mom answered.

"Then, please Jesus, tell Grandpa I love him... and please give Granny a big hug."

"You think Jesus is able to do that?"

"Give Granny a hug? Jesus can do anything Mommy; His hugs might be a little different from mine... but I am sure Granny will know. She knows Jesus very well."

"Well then, I hope Jesus gives you a very big hug, as well. But, in case you might not know the type of hugs he gives, I'm going to give you one myself."



The Man who Wanted to Prove that God Exists (a bedtime story)

Thomas Aquinas was born at a time of great religious debate, a time when the first universities were being built, and a time when new religious communities were born. Though many people believed in God, and most people in Europe were Christian, there was a new excitement in trying to understand the nature of God and how everything in the universe fits together.

As a teenager, Thomas was deeply influenced by the teachings of one of the priests who taught him. He was so excited by what he learned that he wanted to join this new religious community himself. But his family refused him. They had no problem with Thomas' idea to become a priest, but they wanted him to join an older, more established, religious community (started by St. Benedict 800 years earlier) and not the new religious community of priests started by St. Dominic only a few years ago.

Even though his family was against the idea, Thomas joined the Dominicans anyway. His family was so upset that they kidnapped him and brought him back to the family castle and kept him prisoner for an entire year. Day after day, they tried to convince him of the foolishness of his plan. And, week after week, they had to intercept messages and letters from Thomas, who was trying to communicate with his Dominican friends.

It didn't take long for the townspeople to start talking about the whole affair. Though most people believed that parents had a right to tell their children what to do, the fact his parents could not convince Thomas to see things their way, became a bit of an embarrassment. Thomas finally managed to escape one night, some say with the help of his mother, who became convinced that it would be less embarrassing to the family that he escaped, than for him to remain a captive for another year.

Thomas joined the Dominicans in Paris and received his university training under the careful eyes of Albert the Great. Though many of his fellow students made fun of Thomas' size and slowness of movement, calling him a "Dumb Ox", Albert was convinced that he was dealing with a genius, a "Dumb Ox" that had the intelligence that easily surpassed all the students he had taught; an intelligence that was greater than Albert's own.

It wasn't just how much Thomas knew, it was the way he was able to organize all the things he knew that led him to even greater knowledge. Using the power of human reason, he was able to move from what we already know to that which wasn't known.

Thomas Aquinas wrote on many different subjects and was asked to teach many different students. But his favour topics involved God and the Beliefs of the Catholic Church. He even went as far as to prove that God exists.

"What evidence did he have?" He had plenty.

Like elementary school children, who on more than one occasion, have asked me: "Who created God?", Thomas Aquinas understood that all things have a beginning outside of themselves (i.e. A child comes from two parents), that even our planet came into being at some point in time. He said: "Keep going back in time. There must have been some beginning, some event or source that started it all, something or someone who put it all into motion, something or someone that was not created like us or every other thing – The First Cause." Scientist today grapple with the idea of "The Big Bang"; but things don't go "Bang" by themselves. It is obvious Thomas was talking about something greater than that.

A couple of years before he died, Thomas stopped writing. Those who were close to him said he had an encounter with God while praying one day. When he was questioned about the experience, he never said a word, but there is one thing he did say, "All that I have come to know... All that I have come to write and teach... As great as it may seem, is straw (meaning "nothing") compared to the greatness of God." What he was trying to say is that we cannot fully understand, or even imagine, the greatness of God and who he is. All of our words, descriptions, evidence or proofs will fall short when we finally see him face to face.

"You are witnesses to these things," Jesus said to his disciples. Sometimes we need many witnesses, sometimes we only need one. Sometimes we need many proofs, sometimes only one will do.

"We are Witnesses" Game:

Here's a family challenge: Send everyone to their room (or respective tables) with a pen and paper and see who can come up with the most ways a stranger could tell that your family is Christian. In answering this challenge, you may want to think about things that you have in your house, things your family does, the way you relate to one another and the way you relate to others (Young children may be encouraged to draw their answers, and explain their drawings).

Take some time to share your answers and examples that you came up with. Then come up with one thing you can do as a family to show that Christ is at the centre of your lives.