

November 2, 2014  
21st Sunday After Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings  
The Resurrection and the Holy Spirit

If we reflected on it more closely, perhaps we would observe something curious, even surprising, in the Gospel stories about Jesus after his Resurrection; namely, what I venture to call a quality of restraint. Except for the wounds in his flesh (Luke; John), the risen Savior appears to his disciples rather much as they remembered him from before. He is alive, of course, but he does not display—visibly—the marks Saint Paul seems to suggest as characteristic of the resurrected body: “It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body” (1 Corinthians 15:42-44). What the Apostles actually *see*, in these appearances, is the same Jesus as they always knew him.

The plain form of his post-Resurrection appearance may be contrasted with the way Jesus is portrayed at the time of his Transfiguration. On that occasion, we are told, “the appearance of his face was altered, and his robe was white *and* glistening” (Luke 9:29). His appearance at that time took on a radiant quality not of this earth: “His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, as no launderer on earth could whiten them” (Mark 9:3). The witnesses to this event were overwhelmed by a sense of luminosity: “His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light” (Matthew 17:2).

If Jesus could appear in such glory *before* the Resurrection, it is hardly unreasonable to wonder *why* he did not do so *after* it. Yet, the records indicate that he did not do so.

I suggest that this fact is significant in two ways, one touching apologetics and the other pointing to a theological truth:

With respect to apologetics, it is significant that Jesus, when the Apostles saw him after the Resurrection, should appear to them very much as he appeared during his earthly ministry, “the days of his flesh.” It was singularly important for Jesus to be recognized as the *same* Jesus the chosen witnesses had always known. If, when he appeared to them in the

upper room, the risen Savior had come bathed in the glory of an ethereal light, the experience of the Apostles might have prompted them to wonder if his body were really of the same substance as before. “Handle me and see,” he instructed them, “for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have” (Luke 24:39). In short, if the testimony of the Apostles was to be credible to the world—if their witness to the Resurrection was to “stand up in court”—it was necessary for them to have recognized Jesus as the man they had known before.

In addition to this concern of apologetics, the “plainness” of Jesus’ post-Resurrection appearance also indicates a theological truth; namely, his true “publication” as the risen Lord was the testimony he received from the Holy Spirit. According to the New Testament, the Resurrection was not preached until the Holy Spirit came down in power upon the Church.

Then, and then only, did the Apostles go forth to announce that Jesus, “being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death—*him* God raised up” (Acts 2:23-24). The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the proof of the Resurrection: “This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he poured out this which you now see and hear” (2:32-33).

As long as he appeared as a man on this earth, Christ our Lord refused fully to reveal himself. Except for a private revelation to three disciples, men of the world were not permitted to behold him in glory. During all this time on this earth, Jesus never took on an outward glory. Even after his Resurrection he maintained his normal and expected appearance.

All of this comes to an end, however, when the Holy Spirit fully and formally enters into history. From this point on, a manifestation in glory is the order of the day. Of this Holy Spirit Jesus affirms, “He will glorify me, for He will take of what is mine and declare *it* to you” (John 16:14). With the coming of the Spirit, God’s dealings with men—and their dealings with God—are radically altered. There is to be no more secrecy. Things whispered in the ear are now proclaimed on the housetops.

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