

One of my favorite things to do, ever since I was a kid, is to sit and watch as a storm rolls in. It's amazing how quickly the weather changes. The skies can go from bright to dark in minutes. The temperature can drop almost instantly. And this exactly is what happened (this morning/yesterday morning). As I sat on the rectory porch overlooking the bayou, the weather changed from a warm and bright day to dark and cold in just minutes.

As I sat on the porch, experiencing the dark and cold which had just arrived, I wondered if this is how the disciples felt in those hours after the death of Jesus. What a wave of emotions they must have been experiencing! Not only had Jesus died a horrible, torturous death, but almost all of them had abandoned Him. As He was arrested, they ran. As He was put on trial and tortured, they watched from a distance. As He died on the cross and was buried, they hid in fear. How quickly the warmth and light of the Lord's presence with them had changed to cold and darkness!

But in Easter we celebrate with joy that the love of God overcomes the cold and the darkness. The Risen Christ brings warmth and light. And this is what Jesus brought into the Upper Room on Easter Sunday - warmth and light.

“Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see, because a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you can see that I have.” In the Resurrection there was the warmth of a real encounter with Jesus. The Risen Christ is not a ghost. He is not a disembodied spirit. He is not some invention of the collective consciousness of the emotionally rattled Apostles. Jesus Christ rose from the dead in His body. He showed the Apostles His hands and His feet - not cold and dead, but warm and alive. He ate a piece of fish in their presence. Ghosts don't do that. Mass hallucinations don't do that. Only the Risen Christ could bring to the Apostles a real encounter with the warmth of Jesus' bodily 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 and in the prophets and psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. In the Resurrection, Jesus brought to his disciples not only the warmth of an encounter with Him, but also the light of Truth. Jesus spent three years preparing His followers for what was going to happen to Him. He spent three years trying to show them how God's revelation in the Old Testament, how God's plan through salvation history was being fulfilled in Him. Yet, so often they failed to understand. And so in the Resurrection, Jesus opened their mind to understand the Scriptures. By a special grace, He filled their minds and souls with the light of truth so that they would grasp and understand all those mysteries of God's eternal plan.

The warmth and light of the Risen Christ, the encounter and the understanding that Jesus gave to the disciples, brought them healing and faith. It brought them hope in Jesus and greater love for Him. These same gifts are offered to us. The warmth and light of the Risen Christ are not limited to the disciples in the Upper Room. Every follower of Jesus is offered an encounter with the warmth of the Risen Christ. Every follower of Jesus is offered the light of truth that He shares with us. In our prayer and in the sacraments, we encounter the Risen Christ. In the Eucharist, most of all, the warmth of His Presence comes into our very bodies. In our prayer and study of the faith, we can grow in the truth that Jesus offers us through the Church. When we open the pages of Scripture we are enlightened by God's own word to us. We read the writings of the saints and the teachings of the Church, we are pointed toward that Truth who is Christ.

But notice that the warmth and light that Christ brings were not for the disciples alone. The vivid encounter with Jesus, the gift of being enlightened by Him to understand God's revelation, these gifts were given to be shared. The last words of Jesus in the Gospel today are: "You are witnesses of these things." And the disciples knew this. Peter repeated Jesus' words beautifully in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles: "The author of life you put to death, but God raised Him from the dead; of this we are witnesses." All through this Easter season we hear of how the Apostles and disciples spread the Good News of the Resurrection.

They could not help but proclaim the Good News that Christ is risen from the dead. They were witnesses, in Greek “martyrs”, even to point of shedding their blood. Even to death they proclaimed the warmth and the light of the Risen Christ.

This is our call, too. We have experienced the warmth and light of the Risen Christ. And we will continue to experience it in our study of our faith, in our prayer, and in the sacraments that we receive. But as Christians, our duty is not just to enjoy these gifts that Christ gives and keep them for ourselves. Our duty is to be witnesses just as the first Christians were witnesses. Surely, all of us know someone who is searching for the warmth and the light that Jesus brings. You may even think of a particular person right now. Can we not share with them our own experience of the Risen Christ? Can we not share with them the joy and the beauty that comes from our faith? This is how we can share the Good News - by being witnesses to what we have experienced, by being witnesses to what Jesus has done for us. This is how we can lead others to receive for themselves the warmth and the light of Christ.

As we continue to celebrate the joy of the resurrection this Easter season, let us ask the Lord to strengthen our own encounter with Him, to enlighten us with His truth. And may we have the courage and zeal to share those gifts with those around us, so that those who are overwhelmed by the cold and darkness of this world may find peace in the warmth and light of the Risen Jesus.