

Third Sunday of Easter
† Sunday, 18 April 2021



In England & Wales Cycle of Prayer: New members of the Church
Keynote: The witness of faith – the Lord is indeed risen!

Acts of the Apostles 3: 13-15, 17-19

Today the Christian community is presented with the early teaching of the Apostles. Peter speaking to the people of Jerusalem says: *'You are Israelites, it is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the God of our ancestors – who has glorified his servant Jesus.'* Referring to the recent events leading to the arrest, condemnation and death of Jesus, he says, *'while you killed the prince of life, God raised him from the dead, and to that fact we are witnesses.'* This is an example of the essential Easter **kerygma** – the proclamation by the living witnesses – of the events of the death and resurrection of Jesus, with the important message added when Peter urges his listeners: *'Now you must repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.'* We have two challenges today, how to respond to Peter's invitation to repent – to turn to God and, how in our turn to be the living witnesses of the risen Lord.

Responsorial Psalm 4 (4) – At peace with God – a song of thanksgiving

First Letter of John 2: 1–5a

Public confession of sin may have formed part of the initiation into the early Christian community, and be the background to this text. *'We can be sure that we know God,'* writes the apostle John *'only by keeping God's commandments.'* It is this obedience to God that is at the centre of Christian living. *'Anyone,'* writes John, *'who says, "I know God", and yet does not keep God's commandments is a liar, refusing to admit the truth.'* It seems that being 'obedient' is more than just the simple question of following commandments and doing as one is told. There is an element of respect, and of service involved, and maybe, surprisingly the opportunity for spiritual growth. As John says, *'But when anyone does obey what God has said, then God's love comes to perfection in him.'*

Gospel according to Luke 24: 35-48

Luke makes this event part of his narrative of the resurrection. It is evening on that first Easter Day the two disciples have just hurriedly returned to Jerusalem from the village of Emmaus. Luke says, *'the disciples told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised Jesus at the breaking of bread.'* The evangelist continues, *'they were still talking... when Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you!" In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost.'* It is clear, that the person of Jesus, is not at first recognised by the disciples, but reassuring them Jesus says, *'why are these doubts rising in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet. Yes, it is I indeed. Touch me and see for yourselves.'* The disciples are still standing there quite dumbfounded, as would we have been, *'so Jesus says to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" And they offer him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes.'* This presence of the Lord is no mere ghostly apparition then.

All right it is incredible I know! But these are the witnesses – they who lived, walked and talked with Jesus before his execution, while he lived among them. True, to begin with even they had 'problems' with coming to terms with belief in the risen Lord. But identifying Jesus for real, they touched the marks of the nails, ate with him and recognised him in the breaking of bread. *'Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures... "You see how it is written" Jesus said: "that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are the witness to this."*

Are we just going to stand here, dumbfounded, shocked? We, too, are witnesses to this!

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Note – Solemnity of Saint George, Martyr, Patron of England – Friday, 23 April 2021