

Third Sunday of Easter (B)

April 19, 2015.

Jesus Christ the righteous...he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:1-2).

The Easter Season is a privileged time of catechesis or instruction both for the newly-baptized and for all of us who renewed our baptismal vows on Easter Sunday. This liturgical catechesis is called *mystagogy* because it draws into the Mystery of Christ. This mystery is not a riddle or a fable but a *reality that is the foundation of our hope and the reality that illuminates our entire earthly pilgrimage, including the enigma of suffering and death* (Pope Benedict XVI). This is the Mystery that we celebrate with great care and solemnity every year, the Paschal Mystery; and this Mystery is the source of our renewal and life in Christ. As the word *mystery* is used in the New Testament, it signifies an object of revelation. In other words, it is not something that we could come to know without God revealing it. St Peter's sermon quoted in our First Reading speaks of this mystery as *foretold though all the prophets (Acts 3:17)*, though evidently misunderstood and even rejected. The Mystery of course, is Christ our Lord and the content of this Mystery is summarised for us by the Apostle John in our Second Reading: *Jesus Christ the righteous...he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for our sins only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:1-2).*

The word that St. John uses to describe the sacrifice of our Lord is *atoning*. Atonement is a concept which explains how our Lord achieved our salvation and it is absolutely essential to have an understanding of this concept if we wish to understand our Christian faith. The expiation of our sins and our reconciliation with God is atonement, namely *at-one-ment* or *bringing together*. In Himself Christ our Lord brings together divinity and humanity and what had been lost through the devil's deception is restored by our Lord's atoning sacrifice. An ancient Easter homily (attributed to St. John Chrysostom) speaks of the Paschal Mystery in a manner that may help us to understand how to make this Mystery our very own and grow in its knowledge and power. *Christ, the sacrifice that was offered for us, is the father of the world to come. He puts an end to our former life, and through the regenerating waters of baptism in which we imitate his death and resurrection, he gives us the beginning of a new life. The knowledge that Christ is the Passover lamb who was sacrificed for us should make us regard the moment of his immolation as the beginning of our lives. As far as we are concerned, Christ's immolation on our behalf takes place when we become aware of this grace and understand the life conferred on us by this sacrifice (The Liturgy of the Hours, p. 645).*

It could be said that this is what took place in the hearts and minds of our Lord's disciples when our Lord appeared to them, as our Gospel text relates. *'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.... You are witnesses of these things (Lk. 24:44-48).* We know that once the disciples came to the awareness of these truths, everything literally changed. They boldly proclaimed the truth of the resurrection and this has continued through the ages; and we in our day are now the *witnesses of these things*. The truth of the Resurrection is not true because we believe it to be true; it is true in itself. However, the power of its truth is only felt when we become aware of its implication in our own lives. Surely, each year that we celebrate the Paschal Mystery we

do become more aware of this grace; and understand with greater depth of understanding the life conferred on us by our Lord's sacrifice. This is instruction and growth in the Mystery of Christ, *mystagogy*; and because our lives change and we change and grow, this truth must be brought to bear on the concrete circumstances of our lives *here and now*. We approach these Feasts each year with a sense of expectation and hope in the awareness that God desires that we come to a deeper awareness of the life that is ours because of our Lord's saving Sacrifice. This is what active participation in the Sacred Liturgy implies: a deeper sense of the truths and events of salvation and their effect on our life.

In the Paschal Mystery, the words of Scripture are fulfilled; and this means that the atoning sacrifice of our Lord 'according to the Scriptures' *is an event that bears within itself a 'logos' a logic* (Pope Benedict XVI, *Easter Wednesday Catechesis*, 2009). This is the only logic capable of explaining the entire history of man and of the world. On a more intimately personal level, the Paschal Mystery enables us to understand our own existence. To enter into this Mystery and to strive to understand the events of our own lives by its meaning and logic is what our Lord calls each one of us to do and what the Sacred Liturgy endeavours to do during this privileged time of instruction. Our prayerful presence here on this the Lord's Day, the *dies Domini* that each week celebrates the Resurrection is our encounter with the Risen Lord. Our hearts do burn with love when our Lord speaks to us in the Gospel that is proclaimed and like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, our Lord is made known to us in *the breaking of the bread* (Lk. 24:35).

The fullest expression of the Paschal Mystery is the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the devout reception of Holy Communion. In the Sacrifice of the Mass, our Lord's Atoning Sacrifice is made present on our Altar and in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, we the many are brought together and made one in Christ and we are reconciled to God who created us to share *in the incorruptible glory of the resurrection* (Prayer after Communion, Third Sunday of Easter, *The Roman Missal*). So we pattern our lives on the Mystery that we profess and that we celebrate and this is the lesson and work of a lifetime.