

21. April 2022

## The mission of the Church

Lk 24:35-48

*Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread. They were still talking about all this when he 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. But he said, 'Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts stirring in your hearts? See by my hands and my feet that it is I myself. Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have.' And as he said this he showed them his hands and his feet. Their joy was so great that they still could not believe it, as they were dumbfounded; so he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' And they offered him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes. Then he told them, 'This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms, was destined to be fulfilled.' He then opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'So it is written 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 witnesses to this.*

In these days of the Easter Time, in which the Church presents us again and again through biblical texts with the event of the Resurrection, the Lord wants to strengthen our faith in this reality. The Resurrection is decisive for the supernatural dimension of our faith, for only the Lord has returned from the realm of the dead, revealing to us the living example of eternal life. He alone has conquered death. He alone, who is life itself, could work this miracle.

How hard it is for the disciples to believe their eyes! The eyes of their spirit are still veiled. Jesus helps them to believe by showing them the signs in his hands and feet. He even ate in front of them, to reassure them that they did not have a spirit in front of them, but that it was Himself.

Jesus became true man and entered human history, not as a spirit that simply dissolves again. That is why to this day His presence is living and real, not only through the testimony of the Holy Scriptures. He makes himself present in his Church; in the faithful; in the works of faith and charity; in the clergy, to whom he entrusts the

celebration of the sacraments "in persona Christi", so that his presence becomes tangible. In this way, the Church is not only a spiritual reality; she is incarnated in this world, even though she is not of this world.

And to this Church the Risen One has entrusted a mission that always remains valid: In the name of Jesus, she is to preach conversion to all nations so that their sins may be forgiven, starting from Jerusalem.

The witnesses of the Resurrection, who from that time onwards carried this proclamation to the world, became more and more numerous. The Church began to grow and to fulfil the task entrusted to it. Countless missionaries set out for foreign lands, risking their lives and often losing them, to be faithful to the task of evangelisation.

It is necessary to renew again and again the fire lit by the Holy Spirit, and to bear witness to Him through an authentic life of following Christ. The Church needs to renew itself ever anew, and this renewal happens particularly through those who yearn for holiness and unconditionally follow the Lord's call. The Church must be aware that she has been sent, and the Holy Spirit will remind her to fulfil this commission of the Lord.

What is decisive is conversion, i.e. that people accept the Lord's call and change their lives according to God's will. Part of this conversion is, on the one hand, to be aware of the infinite love with which the Lord addresses us. But also an essential part of conversion is a sincere acknowledgement of our sins, of all that separates us from God.

A great danger to the call to conversion is the spirit of relativism, which even has its adherents in the Church. The Church loses her inner strength when the encounter with Jesus is no longer seen as decisive for mankind; when the moral values that she has taught mankind over the centuries are relativised; when sin is no longer pointed out by name and is too quickly justified. If the Church's message no longer focuses on the proclamation of the Gospel and on authentic religious formation, but rather adapts itself to the human and worldly, she herself will become superfluous in the course of time. If the Church loses living contact with the Risen Jesus, she will forget that she has been entrusted with a spiritual, not a political mission.

The destiny of humanity depends on people experiencing an authentic encounter with Christ, on their knowing salvation already in their earthly life, and on the life of the Resurrection coming alive in them already in this world.

Certainly a person who through no fault of his own has not come to know God will not thereby be condemned. We do not know the ways in which God can touch them. However, there is nothing greater and more beautiful that we can bring to people than the proclamation of God's love. This is the incomparable offer that the Father gives us in his Son!

This is why the Church must never cease to pass on the Lord's message, nor can she tire of offering people the treasure entrusted to her.