

Third Sunday of Easter

By: Fr. Larry Rice, CSP

When I was in college, I had the kind of formative religious experience that I suspect many of you have shared. Like many people involved with the Newman group at Penn State, I attended a Search Retreat. Based on the Cursillo model, the Search retreats are very intense, almost exhausting religious experiences. Similar programs have sprung up all over the place, going by a variety of different names. But they all involve a team of retreat leaders giving very personal testimonials to the role that faith plays in their lives. There are silly activities and games designed to help people get to know each other very quickly. And there are very intimate, very moving experiences of prayer. There's also a bit of secrecy about what happens on the retreats; nothing bad happens, but there are some surprises that you wouldn't want spoiled. Lots of people will tell you that these sorts of intensive retreats have changed their lives. I know for me it was an opportunity to appropriate my faith in a way that I hadn't been able to do previously.

I attended one of these retreats, and later was on two retreat teams, and finally served as the director for one weekend. It was a great experience for me. The Search retreats were a unique experience of the presence of Christ. The retreats were an immense high. But in the weeks following the retreat weekend, life somehow returned to normal. Or what passes for normal. I still had studying to do, work to do. I had people to see, laundry to do. Over time, the intense experience of Christ's presence on those retreat weekends, diminished. Just as the extraordinary seemed to overwhelm to ordinary, and made it a life changing retreat, eventually the ordinary crept back in like a slow-moving tide, and nearly overwhelmed the extraordinary experience. And that was OK.

In the Gospel today, the disciples of Jesus are making the discovery that their extraordinary experiences of the risen Christ have to be integrated with the lives they are being called to lead. It is not enough for them to stand around and bask in his glorified presence. Their shock and awe at seeking him alive have to give way to an acceptance that will allow them to continue living their lives. So the first thing he says is, "Peace." Then he has to reassure them that he isn't a ghost. In some of the accounts, he says, go ahead, touch me. Feel the nail marks. Today he says,

"have you got anything to eat?" All very ordinary stuff, for someone recently risen from the dead.

But this is precisely the lesson for us this Sunday. Our faith ought to be marked by experiences of wonder, and joy, and festive celebration. That is what Easter is all about. But our faith is *marked* by those qualities, not entirely defined by them. That wonder and joy are the fuel we need to get us through bad times, and to give us the energy we need to serve each other, and to serve the poor. Our Easter celebration, like that of the disciples, is an essential high-point. But we can't live our lives high all the time.

There were some people involved with the Search retreats who wanted that high to last forever. They never wanted to come down off the mountain. They would organize reunions, and special members-only prayer meetings. They worried me a little bit. Because to maintain that intense religious experience all the time required so much energy. To keep the tide of the ordinary from coming in, they had to retreat from reality, and withdraw from the people who didn't share that intense religious experience.

This is, I think, the interaction of personalities and situations that gives rise to dangerous cults. When an intense religious experience doesn't become integrated into our lives, but has to maintain itself, and seeks to obliterate the ordinary.

Our faith is one of mountains and valleys, we have Easter, and we have Good Friday. There are intense, mystical experiences of the risen Christ, and there is going to church each Sunday. Jesus proclaims, "I am risen from the grave, as I promised." And he asks for a bite to eat. The disciples courageously proclaim the kerygma of the Resurrection, and then argue over what it means, and who it is for. All of this is healthy, and I think it's part of God's plan for us.

So rejoice when God brings you special graces, and times of celebration. And rejoice in the ordinary experiences and times of trial. The Risen Christ is present in all of them.

READINGS OF THE WEEK

Acts 1: 13-19

1 John 2: 1-5

Luke 24: 35-48

April 22, 2012

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我 信 聖 神

吳 智 勳 神 父

復活主日，我們講論過信經中「我期待死人的復活及來世的生命」，今天讓我們反省另外兩句：「我信聖神，祂是主及賦予生命者」及「我信從宗徒傳下來的教會」。

今天的福音似乎沒有提及聖神，其實福音的下一節今天沒有引用：「你們應當留在這城中，直到佩戴上自高天而來的能力」，這能力自然是指聖神的能力。今日的福音使我們感歎，原來要相信基督的復活是那麼困難。首先婦女們回報看見天使，接著是伯多祿與若望的報告，現在又有厄瑪烏兩門徒的見證，但仍未能使門徒相信。到耶穌顯現時，他們又以為是見鬼。因此耶穌邀請他們看看祂的手腳，觸摸祂，並在他們面前進食，只想表明：「分明就是我」，而鬼是沒有肉和骨的。可惜門徒仍不敢相信，只是驚訝。耶穌再用聖經開啓他們的心靈。結果怎樣，我們不太清楚，起碼要到五旬節，門徒才出來宣講復活的基督。這就是耶穌要他們留在城中，直到有了來自高天的能力的意思。換句話說，沒有聖神，根本沒有信仰的能力；有了聖神，人才會對於有關基督的一切豁然貫通，因為「祂是主及賦予生命者」。

今日的第一篇讀經是伯多祿的講道，他講的是基督的死亡與復活，應驗了先知的預言，內容幾乎都是耶穌講過的，結果是五千個男人信了。這並不是伯多祿的講道比耶穌厲害，而是聖神的力量。我們必須相信聖神今天仍在工作，每年香港不止有五千人皈依基督(天主教和基督教加起來)，可見聖神仍在賦予生命。每個基督徒都應相信聖神在世界內活躍地工作，也在每人自己身上工作。

今天福音最後的一句話是：「你們就是這些事的見證人」，在第一篇讀經中，宗徒也自稱是復活的見證人。宗徒的見證非常重要，我們的信仰重點不在證明，而是在作證上；教會正是建在宗徒的見證上。新約廿七部書必與宗徒的見證有關，當日新約諸書的鑑定，也與宗徒的見證為標準。與宗徒所傳的信息不調和的事物，我們不會相信。因此，『信經』明認：「我信從宗徒傳下來的教會」。

有人可能會問：宗徒可信嗎？復活的報道會否為宗徒的杜撰？我們可反問：杜撰為宗徒有甚麼好處？他們全部因為宣講基督而受到迫害，甚至死於非命；似乎沒有人會為一個杜撰的故事而願受那麼大的痛苦，勿忘十字架的痛苦比中國人的凌遲極刑不相伯仲。保祿宗徒為宣講基督而甘願長期受苦，而且受得那麼甘心情願，因為他所經驗復活的基督是真的。當我們看到聖經記載宗徒的見證時，聖神便會推動我們去相信他們的見證。的確，我們的教會就是建在這些寧死不屈的證人身上。

聖神也能幫助我們在生活上體驗一下福音宣講的真實性。耶穌答應祂所給我們的平安不是世界可以給的，祂給我們的喜樂無人可以奪去，祂的真理使我們自由，我們可以驗證一下是否真的如此。如果聖神真的幫助我們感受到福音的真實性，我們可以像宗徒一樣去為基督作證。

讓我們好好領略聖神和作證的重要，我們念下面『信經』這兩句時會有特別的意思：「我信聖神，祂是主及賦予生命者」和「我信從宗徒傳下來的教會」。

摘自「公教報」

本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 二 年 四 月 廿 二 日

宗 1:13-19； 若一 2:1-5； 路 24:35-48