

**6th Sunday of Easter Cycle A
May 9th, 1999**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Acts 8:5-8, 14-17
1 Peter 3:15-18
John 14:15-21**

Faith, while not perfect, enables us and others to be free and to see the Lord.

“I will not leave you orphans,” says Jesus in John chapter 14. “I will come to you...on that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.”

What does it mean for us to say the risen Lord is with us always? What does it mean to say Christ stands in our midst?

It means that when people see us, they are seeing Christ. And when people see us they are seeing the face of the one who sent Christ – the one whom Jesus now teaches us to call “Our Father.”

When people leave behind their fears and choose to walk by faith in God’s love, they become like Christ. And the transformation from fear to faith reveals Christ, who does stand in our midst. Truly we are brothers and sisters of the Lord Jesus – the incarnation is real; the enfleshment of the Lord is here and now.

Such fearless faith takes shape in the teen-ager at Columbine High School in Colorado who, when asked by the gunman if she believed in God, unhesitatingly said, “Yes”...and gave her life in witness to that belief.

The Easter gospel tells how God transformed the panic and fright of the first disciples into joy and wonder and courage. Because of the risen Christ, those

who were once afraid became witnesses, messengers, heralds. Now, communities of faith see the same transformation with their own eyes, as Christ leads the newest members of the church from fear to faith, from doubt to trust.

Now we too can say that the risen Christ stands in our midst: for we can watch people leave behind their fears and choose to walk by faith. This is the Church’s prayer every time we gather in this Easter season: that Christ will transform us as he has transformed the newly baptized members of the Church; that Christ will open our eyes to see that he is still forming people as his disciples.

Often people think they should gather on Sunday only if they are filled with faith. Some think that only those with perfected faith are welcome or worthy here. But that’s nonsense. No community of Christians is a gathering of perfected people or perfect disciples. Fortunately, the risen Christ does not demand perfection of us.

No, Christians gather because the risen Christ is still forming us, still leading us from fear to faith. On this or any Sunday, Christians gather both with our faith in God’s love and also with our lack of faith in God’s love. We gather with our faith *and* with our fear.

We all know that fear is such a part of life for us,

woven deep into our hearts. Every generation of disciples, every congregation, is a mixture of faith and lack of faith. The gospel recounts the risen Christ's pledge to be with us, not to leave us orphaned. But like Christians in every generation, we wonder if he is with us or not, in our midst, or if we are on our own.

But we have a multitude of signs of resurrection in our midst and of fearless faith. Our Catechumens and Candidates for full communion journeyed with us for weeks to this table at Eastertime. And now, in the Easter season, we are graced by those who are making their first holy communion – supported by the faith of their families, these young people step forward – a journey of faith overcoming their fear, supported by this praying community. And earlier many of us who never thought we would do such a thing, traveled the neighborhoods proclaiming the Good News of Jesus, tapping on doors and, for the most part, being welcomed warmly. Faith overcomes fear in glorious ways.

This holy food and fellowship is nourishment for the faith which triumphs over all obstacles. For this we give praise to the Father.

Among her meditations, Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic worker movement, wrote this: “We read in the life of Theophane Venard in Viet Nam of how he considerately shed his clothes before his head was chopped off so that the executioner who was paid for his deed with them would not be receiving blood-stained garments.” Such was his love for his enemies remembering Jesus words, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

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