Meditation

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An Easter-Pentecost way of life

Oliver Iwuchukwu CSSp

Many people’s favorite Easter story is the one in Luke’s gospel where Jesus joins two downcast disciples on their way home from Jerusalem after all that had happened there. He listens to their tale of woe, joins them for an evening meal and then uncovers who he is: he takes the bread, says the blessing, breaks that bread and gives it to them. “Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.” (Lk. 24:31)

We recall that a blind man had once approached Jesus with a request: “Lord that I may see.” This man wanted his eyesight restored. Without knowing it, he had touched on a core component of Jesus’ mission: opening people’s eyes. But it turned out to be easier to give new sight to the blind than to open the eyes of his disciples.

Seeing is believing, though not always. “Blessed are they who have not seen and yet have believed,” was Jesus’ answer to Thomas a week after Easter Sunday. Seeing is understanding — inner sight, insight.

Seeing rightly

There is eyesight; and then there is insight. Eyesight sees the contours, the surfaces, the shapes of things and people. Insight probes the heart of the matter — what lies beneath the surface. Saint Exupery’s Little Prince gives some good advice: “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye.”

What we see depends on our eyesight/insight and, more importantly perhaps, on our disposition, on what we are looking for. In the house of Simon the Pharisee, Jesus asked Simon a question: “Simon, do you see this woman?” “Of course I see her. She’s a prostitute,” was Simon’s unspoken answer. Looking at this woman, Simon saw a sinner. Jesus, on the other hand, saw a woman who had messed up her life now trying to turn that life around. Jesus saw in her the person Simon failed to see. Jesus challenged Simon to look beneath the surface, and not just at her outward appearance.

Our ideas of others may well prevent us from seeing them as they really are. Jesus’ way of seeing takes us beyond outward appearances to a person’s inner being. That “prostitute”
has the same humanity as us. This new way of seeing goes hand in hand with a new way of living: from Jesus’ point of view everybody is my neighbor.

**The Spirit and the early Christian community**

In the Easter-Pentecost readings, we see how bit-by-bit the followers of Jesus created the way of life he talked about. Before he died he had said to the Father: “I have finished the work you gave me to do.” It would be up to his student-disciples to put into practice what they had learned from the Master. He was ready to move on and to hand the work over to them. We can hear Jesus saying, “I know they’re not the best, but I trust them.”

But they wouldn’t be fully ready until “they had received power from on high.” Only then would they become instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit. “You will be given what to say,” he promised them. “The Spirit of your Father will be speaking through you.” But for that to happen they should wait together, listening in silence and in prayer. How necessary that is for anyone who would speak in the name of the risen Lord.

A miraculous transformation occurred at Pentecost. These people came out from behind bolted doors and “spoke in tongues” — they overcame the confusion of Babel, they broke down the boundaries between people as they found themselves able to speak to others in a language they could understand. They became effective communicators and some of them influential leaders.

The Spirit of the Risen Christ, the Holy Spirit, became their inspiring, guiding spirit. They became instruments in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Some people, like Simon the magician, tried to buy the power of the Holy Spirit. But it wasn’t for sale. Simon was told that this power comes when we are willing to be led by the Spirit, when we repent and change our ways.

**The Good News proclaimed**

The mandate of the Risen Christ was, “Go, make disciples of all nations. Teach them to observe all the commandments as I taught you.” Turn the world into a family governed by one law — the law of love. “Love your neighbor as I have loved you” — a radically new commandment different from the “Love your neighbor as yourself” of the Old Testament. They gave this mandate their whole-hearted attention.

Their message was a simple message with little or no ambiguity: Jesus of Nazareth is the Messiah. He was rejected, crucified and buried. But he rose from the dead. “Jesus is Lord.” So — repent, believe in Jesus and join the community of believers. A simple message, in simple terms, for simple-minded people. No litany of dogmas or creeds. They were not concerned with the theological problems that later engaged the Church’s attention: relations between the Three Persons of the Trinity, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, whether infants who died without baptism were saved, whether Mary died and/or was assumed into heaven, etc.

The doctrines and dogmas formulated in response to these issues would eventually contribute to the break-up of Christians into different “denominations”. An unfortunate development in a movement founded on the law of love. Anthony De Mello has a joke which underscores the ugly side of this development. A little girl asked a little boy: “Are you a Presbyterian?” And he answers: “No, we belong to another abomination.”

**The disruptive Spirit**

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, he told his followers to stay in Jerusalem until they received power from above. Then they were to fan out across the Mediterranean Sea north and west. The Spirit made this possible by not allowing them the comfort of a settled life in a secure environment. “I want Paul and Barnabas for another assignment,” the Spirit told the community in Antioch. The best-laid plans were disrupted.

What stands out about those first followers of the Way was an unshakeable reliance on the guidance of the Spirit and the
It’s 7:30 a.m. on 2nd February, and we gather near Laval chapel so that Father Nicetas Kyara CSSp can bless our candles. We start the procession singing *Walk in the Light* — the light of our candles, the early sunlight in a cloudless blue sky and our song in harmony joined by the birds and our drum.

**Faith is like a muscle and needs daily exercise.**

When I fractured my elbow playing rugby on the Under 13s in 1946 in St Mary’s College, Dublin, the doctor took off the plaster and said, “You need to exercise it daily.” Like Faith.

Seeing is believing. We can’t see Faith, but my Faith is strengthened as I walk with 3 CSSp Novices from Tanzania, 3 Kenyans, and Roco from Uganda.

Mary is presenting her baby Jesus in the temple and let’s pray that our seven Novices will present themselves for First Profession in June.

As we offer ourselves and our gifts we sing, “Father, we adore you, *Lay our lives before you.*”

For breakfast we have porridge made from millet and groundnuts. It’s c-o-l-d in the house up here on Lushoto Mountain!

We drive up another mountain to the Lutheran Bio-diversity Reserve in Irente where we enjoy a scenic picnic of chicken, vegetable and “spuds” from our own farm. Our Novices work hard and cheerfully on our farm to be self-supporting.

We have a newly built carpentry shop and drying shed just *waiting for help* to put in light and water. A word is as good as a wink!!

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**Exercising our faith**

**Austin Healy CSSp, Tanzania**

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**We exercise our Faith.**

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