

Jesus eats broiled fish

Luke 24.36-48

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In our Gospel reading we see Jesus eating fish - after he rose from the dead. The Evangelist Luke is so precise to tell us it was a broiled fish. Did he have nothing more important to tell us? What is the reason for talking about this broiled fish?

1. Eating fish

The disciples of Jesus had heard about his resurrection; Mary Magdalene and Peter and the two men who were walking to Emmaus had seen Jesus. So they heard about it - and their mind must have been doing funny things with them. I would be so confused. Did it really happen? Or did they see a ghost? Did they smoke too much pot? Or just make up the story? Wishful thinking?

Then Jesus appeared to the whole group. Suddenly he was there, in their midst. And they freaked out. Startled. Frightened. They thought they saw a spirit. A ghost.

But Jesus then makes very sure that they realise that he is not a ghost, but that the risen Christ is the same as Jesus of Nazareth. The Risen Lord we believe in, is the Jesus of history. But they did not know that immediately.



This, by the way, is encouraging for us. Our faith does not have to understand it all before Jesus can come to us; we do not need to be perfect for him to come so close to us that we can, as it were, touch his body. As we do each week with Holy Eucharist. Your imperfect hands can touch the Lord, and He fills your hands with himself, with his blessings.

Jesus seemed like a ghost to the disciples, because how could Jesus suddenly be in their midst while doors and windows were closed? St. Ambrose of Milan commented that "He penetrated their closed retreat not because His nature was incorporeal, but because He had the quality of a resurrected body." (*Expositio Evangelii Sec. Lucam*, in loc".).

Jesus wanted to stress the reality of the resurrection. The risen Lord was no phantom or hallucination. He was real. The Jesus who died was in truth the Christ who rose again. Christianity is not founded on the dreams of men's disordered minds or the visions of their fevered eyes, but on one who in actual historical fact faced and fought and conquered death and rose again.

But why was this issue so important? For a few reasons. First, the early church was quickly confronted with Greek philosophy that did not care much for the body.

There were people in that day who believed that flesh was evil... They did not want resurrection, they wanted to get rid of the body. Because resurrection, in one way or another; speaks of our present body continuing in a new state.

But God loves our body. He made it. He made this whole tangible world. And he made it good. And our hope and expectation is not the destruction of this good world, of our good bodies, but the renewal. This is the wonderful hope we have.

There was another reason why for Jesus, and for the writer Luke, it was important to underline that Jesus rose from the dead physically. They were countering the idea that the goal of life is to rise above the world and eventually to escape from this world into the calm of the spirit. We do not believe in boedha or zen, the idea that we escape from the world by calming our mind. As Christians we embrace this world and we suffer with this world.

Therefore, physical hurts and suffering and the pain of human beings, such as hunger, disease, slavery, child trafficking, can never be ignored by the church. The idea that God cares only about things 'spiritual' and that we should not care too much about this world and its suffering is a heresy. The new body of Jesus shows: God wants renewal, not denial of this physical life.

That is why even today we care about health, and the arts, about nature, environmental matters, because God cares for his world. He does not deny what is visible and tangible. The risen Lord was even eating a fish. A broiled fish.

This life matters. God made it, and he will give it a magnificent make-over. And Jesus was the first one. And those who believe in him, will follow in his track. Jesus is alive again - and we will be alive again.

2. Did I not tell you?

Not only did Jesus invite his disciples to see him, touch him, hear him speak, and even see him eat that fish - all that to prove that the same man they walked the roads of Israel with, was now alive again.

Jesus also underlined that it was really him, by saying:

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 and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled, [...] that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead.

The one who spoke about this theme many times, while walking through the fields, while celebrating dinners, he was the same one who now stood in their midst because his old body that suffered, and was killed, was now alive again.

And this was in line with the message of the Old Testament.

I think Jesus purposely underlines that he suffered before he died. Because this suffering also underlined that he was a real, normal human being. A normal man, who could feel pain, who could be hurt.

Jesus could be hungry. In Gethsemane he was really scared, very scared. Yes, he knew, God would help him through his most difficult suffering and death, but of course he was afraid of the process.

And this was, for Jesus and for the Evangelist Luke, another way of underlining: the risen Jesus was the same one who they knew before he died. AND: He was a real man. And for those infatuated with the philosophies of those days, or of our days, this shows:

God became a real man. God had adopted a tangible, real body. God suffered. He knows what it means to suffer.

“But God, this goes totally against the grain of philosophical logic”. “Yes my child. That is my prerogative.”

When historical reality goes against philosophy, what do we accept?

Jesus has shown his disciples that even after his resurrection, he is still, somehow, the human Jesus who can be touched and who can eat a fish with us. This is our God. Almighty and very close to us.

And this is our hope; this is our encouragement. God cares about this life. He cares about our bodies. He cares about you. If you have physical problems, if you are sick, He cares. If you have money problems, He cares. If you have relationship problems, He cares. He has adopted our humanity and he is able to feel our pain.

To affirm the resurrection is not to affirm that Jesus is taken out of this world. Luke puts the Risen Christ right back into the world. "See my hands and feet and touch me."

3. This is the gospel

And this is the gospel that Jesus gave to his disciples to spread in the whole world. He made clear how urgent this was. The disciples had hardly recovered from their shock, if they had recovered at all, and immediately Jesus gave them a task.



Just like our imperfection, or us being messed up, can never be an excuse for not doing what our Lord asks of us. He does not wait till we are perfect - then he can wait till Kingdom Come.

We are all called to go out into the world and present to all men and women this offer of salvation; followers of Jesus invite others to repent, and with that comes the offer of forgiveness.

Repent means that we have to turn away from idols, from false hope, from escapism, from fake stories, from any philosophy that cannot really help us in our pain...

And repent means that we turn to God. The one who forgives our sins. What we have done in our daily life, what we do in our daily life, it matters to God. He takes it seriously. By talking about forgiveness Jesus again underlines that this world matters. What we do in this world matters.

And he assumes we all sin. You do not need to be God to know that, do you? We all know our sins of omission and commission.

But if we turn from what is wrong and we turn to God, He forgives. And that is a never ending process. And in that process He is close, every so close - a present helper in our needs.

Because He was a man, He knows what it is to be human. He knows how it feels to have problems, pain, what it means for us to die. The fear, the pain. The *angst* we live with.

And He rose from the dead. Our God reigns the universe. And He is present in our everyday life to help us through. And He has made us people of hope by showing that death does not have the last word. He does.

“See, I will make all things new.”

+ Amen

