

Reading for Weekday in the Third Week of Eastertide

20th April 2024

1st Reading: Acts 9:31-42

During Peter's ministry in Lydda he restores Tabitha to life

In those days the church throughout Judea, Galilee, and Samaria had peace and was built up. Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it increased in numbers. Now as Peter went here and there among all the believers, he came down also to the saints living in Lydda. There he found a man named Aeneas, who had been bedridden for eight years, for he was paralyzed. Peter said to him, "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you; get up and make your bed!" And immediately he got up. And all the residents of Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord.

Now in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas. She was devoted to good works and acts of charity. At that time she became ill and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in a room upstairs. Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, who heard that Peter was there, sent two men to him with the request, "Please come to us without delay." So Peter got up and went with them; and when he arrived, they took him to the room upstairs. All the widows stood beside him, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them. Peter put all of them outside, and then he knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, "Tabitha, get up." Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. He gave her his hand and helped her up. Then calling the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive. This became known throughout Joppa, and many believed in the Lord. Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.

Responsorial: Psalm 115: 12-17

R./: What return can I make to the Lord for all that he gives to me?

How can I repay the Lord for his goodness to me?
The cup of salvation I will raise;
I will call on the Lord's name. (R./)

My vows to the Lord I will fulfil
before all his people.
O precious in the eyes of the Lord
is the death of his faithful. (R./)

Your servant, Lord, your servant am I;
you have loosened my bonds.
A thanksgiving sacrifice I make:
I will call on the Lord's name. (R./)

Gospel: John 6:60-69

"We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.."

When many of the Lord's disciples heard this, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?" But Jesus, being aware that his disciples were complaining about it, said to them, "Does this offend you?"

Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. But among you there are some who do not believe.” For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe, and who was the one that would betray him. And he said, “For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father.” Because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

So Jesus asked the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?” Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.”

Short reflection on the reading for today

Through the Easter season the risen Christ brings life to what seemed dead within us, to make our faith blossom again. We can have a kind of spiritual rebirth, like the woman in Lydda who was revived by St Peter in today’s story from the Acts. Her name was Dorcas and her spirit of charity and compassion had endeared her to many, especially the widows and the needy. They felt her loss keenly, and of course were delighted to have her back among them, alive and well.

“It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh cannot do so,” said Jesus. “The words I spoke to you are spirit and life.” When others began to move away from Jesus, unsure about what kind of way he was leading them, Peter made it clear that he would stay. “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” If we decide to follow Peter’s example, we must trust that Jesus really does point the way to union with God. His words and his spirit can achieve what is beyond the power of human nature. “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh cannot do so.”

Peter’s efforts to bring the faith to the wider world are reflected in the Acts of the Apostles, showing how he often had the power to work miracles. What part can we ordinary people play in carrying on Peter’s ministry of encouragement and healing? We may find practical ways of helping others, as Dorcas did, finding ways to help the poor, speaking out on behalf of justice, or just listening with empathy to our neighbour’s ailments. If we are sometimes challenged to go beyond our comfort zone and attempt what seems impossible, let’s remember that “It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh cannot do so.”

Jesus often asked his followers probing questions, to challenge the quality of their faith.. During a critical time when many were falling away, he asked them, ‘What about you, do you want to go away too?’ In the previous verses many would-be followers had abandoned Jesus because he spoke about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. Their turning their back on him prompted Jesus to put his faithful few to the test: ‘Do you want to go away too?’ He was probing, inviting them to make a personal commitment to stay with him; for they were free to leave him like so many others.

The risen Lord also looks for commitment from us: ‘do you want to go away too?’ In our modern world many have turned away from faith. So we each need to make a more personal, deliberate decision about faith than was required in the past. As we try to make that decision we can do no better than to make Peter’s words our own: ‘Lord, you have the message of eternal life, and we believe that you are the Holy One of God.’