

Third Sunday of Easter, Year B  
Acts 3:13-15, 17-19  
Ps 4 *passim*  
1Jn 2:1-5a  
Lk 24:35-48

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*Credo in unum Deum, Patrem omnipotentem, factorem caeli et terrae, visibilium omnium et invisibilium.* Thus begins the Latin text of a statement of our Christian faith that was painstakingly hammered out way back in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. Painstakingly, yes, and at the cost of street riots and bloodshed. That statement of faith is the Nicene Creed, and we will recite the entire text, in English, right after I'm done with this homily.

"I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible." At the start of the Creed we identify God the Father as the maker of all things visible and invisible. Thus we affirm the existence of two orders of being, things visible and things invisible.

It has become commonplace for some people – often highly educated, sophisticated people – to deny either the existence or the importance of things invisible. For these people – they are called empiricists – all that matters are things we can know. And knowing something, for an empiricist, means to perceive it with the senses and to measure it. Empiricists operate under the belief that everything worth thinking about must be seen, whether through a microscope or a telescope; everything must be subject to verification and measurement, preferably in a laboratory.

Last month Stephen Hawking died. He was one of the greatest scientists ever. And he was an atheist. So far as I know, he died an atheist. He said that he believed in science and that faith in science was enough for him. We pray for the repose of his soul; we pray that he will know the tender mercies of the loving God who has revealed the divine self to us. And we take joy in the example of the women and men of our parish who earn their livelihoods in the fields of science, technology, and engineering or in the health care professions. They witness to the truth that life has more worth and meaning than can be found in a test tube or from looking through a microscope or a telescope.

In these Sundays of Easter season the lectionary presents Gospel passages that focus on the post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus. For the past two weeks we've seen Jesus take pains to demonstrate – to prove empirically – that he really, truly, and literally has risen from the dead. Last Sunday, in the Gospel of John, Jesus challenged the apostle Thomas – doubting Thomas – to poke his fingers into Jesus's nail holes and to jam his hand into Jesus's wounded side. After all, Thomas had said that he wouldn't believe until he had empirical evidence, and that's precisely what Jesus gave him.

Today's Gospel, from Luke, picks up right after the story of the two companions who had seen their hopes dashed when Jesus was killed and who were trudging back home to Emmaus. The risen Lord Jesus walked alongside them but they didn't recognize him until they all sat down to break bread together. Now they are back in Jerusalem, with the apostles and some other disciples. Jesus appears to them all, and they cannot believe their eyes. Nobody survives a crucifixion, they figure, and it's easier to believe in ghosts than to believe in resurrection. So, Jesus invites them to poke and prod him. "Touch me and see," he says. And then right before their eyes he eats some baked fish. At the end of the conversation he tells them that now they are his witnesses.

At the end of last week's Gospel Jesus told Thomas (in effect), "OK, you've gotten your empirical evidence. And so you believe." But, he said, "blessed are those who have not seen and have believed." That's us, folks. We are the ones who have not seen – not empirically, the way the apostles saw – and yet have believed. And why should we believe? Because each of those apostles went to his death – and they almost all suffered horrible deaths – attesting to the truth of Jesus's resurrection. Jesus really, truly, and *literally* has risen from the dead. He has conquered death. He has proven that light is stronger than darkness, that grace is stronger than sin, and that life is stronger than death.

The apostles were ordinary men, very ordinary. None of them had superpowers. They were none of them exceptionally clever or heroic or brave; the Gospels are clear on that point. And if even one of them had cracked under pressure, the news would have been spread far and wide. Nobody dies for a made-up story. Nobody dies for a hoax. Nobody dies for a metaphor.

And therefore we can believe in the God who made all things visible and invisible. We can believe the revelation of God contained in the word of God and proclaimed by Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. The immensity of God overflows; it spills over the limited capacity of human understanding. And therefore we embrace with joy and confidence the mysteries of our Faith. We believe in the Trinity, that our one God is a dynamic union of three divine Persons, each distinct but never separate from the others. We believe in the two natures of Christ, that Jesus is truly God and truly man, 100% divine and 100% human. We believe in the Eucharist, that through the action of the priest standing as another Christ the bread and wine become the body, blood, soul, and divinity of the risen Lord Jesus. The candidates for confirmation stood right here on Holy Saturday at the Easter Vigil and professed it: "We believe and profess," they said, "all that the Church believes, teaches, and proclaims to be revealed by God." We are his witnesses.

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