

Easter 3B (4/26/09 – *Being REALLY Open-Minded*)

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

Life is sometimes full of coincidences. Or better said – in keeping with the true comment of one of the presenters at yesterday’s *Catechism Convocation* – sometimes God makes several things coincide in our lives for a purpose. The case in point is the sermon theme for today: *Being REALLY Open-Minded*. I had chosen this title for my sermon already on Wednesday – after my initial study of the *Holy Gospel* appointed for this day. On Friday I received Vicar Jeff Johnson’s sermon in which he emphasized the very same theme – so much so, in fact, that I was tempted to “borrow” parts of his sermon (but didn’t). And in the *Catechism Convocation* the theme of open-mindedness came up (at least from one of the presenters).

Indeed, this is probably no coincidence at all – for all of us had the same Gospel text on our minds ... and we all live in the same sinful world ... that constantly confuses what it means to be open-minded. So let’s look at this theme in the light of our *Holy Gospel* (and other readings) for today.

It is – I don’t think *ironic* is the term – strange ... yes, that’s it, strange. Well, more than strange, really – twisted ... perverted ... upside-down and backwards – that the world likes to think of itself as being “open-minded” ... and would call us Bible-believing Christians close-minded and archaic. The world considers the acceptance and promotion of homosexuality, same-sex marriage, and living together outside of wedlock to be “open-minded” thinking – while we, the Church, who judges it to be contrary to God’s design and institution and will are considered ultra-conservative (stone-age, even) and close-minded. The world wants to do what it wants to do – **apart** from God – and considers **that** being open-minded. The world – and also our own sinful flesh – wants to sit in judgment of all things ... to decide what’s best for us **without** God’s Word ... even **contrary** to God’s Word ... and wants to call **that** being open-minded.

Or to put it another way: the world and our own sinful flesh wants to pretend God doesn’t exist ... ignore His holy Commandments ... shut up His Word ... and shut out God altogether – claiming that the belief in God and in some absolute, unchangeable Word of God is archaic, unenlightened thinking – and wants to call **that** being open-minded (when it is, in fact, nothing more than that most ancient, original sin of satan and our first parents in the garden). While we who believe in God and His Word and Christ’s work on the Cross for the salvation of the world and His resurrection for the life of the world – well, we’re close-minded fools!

But notice I said that our own sinful flesh thinks just like the world thinks – don't let yourself off ... thinking: *That's right, pastor ... give it to those evil unbelievers out there.* Yes, our own sinful flesh thinks just like the world – **your** sinful flesh thinks just like the world. **Your** flesh – and mine, too, of course – wants to think itself open-minded. Nothing is outside the realm of possibility – except that absolute, inspired, infallible, unchangeable Word of God ... that just can't be! *Science says ... thus and such* – so God's Word must be wrong ... or only symbolic. Science says walking on water is impossible (unless it's frozen water, of course ... ice) – so the Scriptures must be wrong when they say Christ walked on the water to the disciples in the boat. "Open-minded" thinkers couldn't possibly believe a myth like that! Science says that miracles don't happen – unless, of course, it happens to be the "miracle" of life spontaneously coming into existence in some primordial sludge of a world after a spontaneous "big bang" initiated by no outside, intelligent force (i.e., **without God**) ... that **one** "miracle" that suits its secular "religion." Only a simple, close-minded Neanderthal would believe that God created the universe and everything in it ... breathing into His man the breath/spirit of life.

"Open" minds think it is the most logical explanation that Jesus' disciples stole His body ... despite the sealed tomb and posted guard (who had to be bribed to lie about the matter). "Open" minds think: *Live and let live.* "Open" minds think: *I'm OK, you're OK ... so long as we're happy doing what we're doing ... not harming anyone else* (at least, not without their consent). **Your** mind and **my** mind are open to all kinds of sins – greed, pride, anger, lust, covetousness, sloth, gluttony, cheating (as long as it's only a little ... just this once, under these "mitigating" circumstances), lying (as long as it's only a little white lie ... or to keep from hurting someone ... or to save face), stealing (as long as it's from the big company or Uncle Sam). Yes, we're **very** open-minded ... when it comes to the sins **we** commit – but very close-minded about the things of God in general.

In fact, by nature we are **completely** close-minded about the things of God – as 1COR 2.14 puts it: *The natural person DOES NOT ACCEPT the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is NOT ABLE to UNDERSTAND them because they are spiritually discerned.* If we are going to understand ... and accept the things of God, then **God** must work that in us ... continuously.

That's what we see going on in our *Holy Gospel* reading for today. We are once again back on that first Easter ... toward the end of the day. The '**they**' our first verse refers to is the two disciples of Emmaus – who saw Jesus, spoke with Him along the way home from Jerusalem, and recognized Him as they sat at table and He blessed and broke the bread. Note that it was only **then** that their eyes were **opened** to see that it **was** Jesus. It was only **then** – by the work of Christ and

His Holy Spirit – that their minds were **opened** to fully understand **all** that He had spoken to them along the way ... how **all** the Scriptures pointed to Him ... how **all** that had happened was the fulfillment of Scripture (including His death and resurrection) ... how **all** of it was **for them** ... and **for us** ... for our eternal salvation.

Then, when Jesus had disappeared from their midst, they ran all the way back to Jerusalem – seven miles – to tell the disciples what had happened: how they had seen Jesus on the road ... the things He said to them ... and how He was recognized by them in the breaking of bread. **This** is what the disciples were hearing just as *Jesus Himself stood among them, and said to them, “Peace to you!”* [LK 24.36] *But they were started and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.* [24.37] They were still close-minded to all that had been told them throughout the day – about the stone, the angels, the empty tomb, Jesus appearing to Mary Magdalene ... then just recently to the two Emmaus disciples. They were still close-minded to all of it – for *the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God ... he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.* We are **all** close-minded – until Christ and His Holy Spirit does His work in us!

So that’s just what Jesus did ... and still does. *And He said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself* – which is to say, that His hands and feet still bore (indeed, **forever** bear) the scarred imprints of the nails by which He was crucified to bring forgiveness, life, and salvation to light. *Touch Me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.* But they just couldn’t believe it yet. *And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, He said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” They gave Him a piece of broiled fish, and He took it and ate before them.* [24.38-43]

But even with such proofs before them, their minds may have yet been closed – at least partially. So Christ continues now with the Word – for Christ is **always** working in us and in our lives through His Word. *Then He said to them, “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 – that is, throughout the entire Old Testament Scriptures – must be fulfilled.” Then He OPENED THEIR MINDS to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in His Name to all nations.”* [24.44-47] First, there is the Word that must come to us ... then **through** the Word Christ and the Holy Spirit work in us to **open** our minds so that

we might understand and believe.

That is how Christ is still working today – right here in our midst. He comes to us in His risen Body and Blood. He gives us the Word that we must repent of all our sinful, worldly, so-called open-mindedness. He gives us His Word of peace. He gives us the Word that our sins are all forgiven by His work on the Cross. He gives us the Word that He is risen from the grave ... gives us the Word that **we** shall be raised again to life just as He was. He gives us the Word that in this life He shall be with us always, and in the life to come that we shall be with Him forever. **Then** He causes us to be *REALLY Open-Minded* ... to believe that it is all true ... **for us** ... so that we say:

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!]

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. [Amen]