Subtlety of the Risen Lord Jesus

Homily for Divine Mercy Sunday 2020
Rev. Daniel Steele

St. Paul Cathedral Chapel, Yakima, WA

Well, as you’re sitting at home on lockdown, maybe you’ve gotten a little bored like me. Maybe you decided to turn on the TV, or, Netflix, or, Hulu to play some old reruns. Maybe you even turned on NBC’s show, “The Office” starring Steve Carrell as Michael Scott. If you don’t know “The Office,” I’ll explain. Mr. Scott is the manager of a mid-sized paper supply company in Scranton, PA called Dunder-Miflin. Michael Scott is known to be an avant-garde leader. Some may say “absolutely crazy.” Others say “maybe he’s just a genius.”

One particular episode I enjoy takes place on Halloween where Michael Scott dresses up like Jesus. Everyone says to him, “Michael – who are you?” He says, “Well, OBVIOUSLY I’m Jesus, the Son of God! I have the Power of Flight!” Mr. Scott is onto something very important; a very moral and theological topic – that is; What is the quality of the resurrected body? Michael knew something, that Jesus had the Power of Flight.

St. Thomas Aquinas said this also. He said there were four Qualities to the Resurrected Body; 1) Agility, 2) Subtlety, 3) Impassibility, and, 4) Clarity. So, what was Michael Scott onto? He was talking about Subtlety. Maybe Scott was a secret Thomistic Theologian. Who knows, if only he had written more things down. (see Summa Theologica, Supplement, Q. 83).

Our Gospel begins today: On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst. He had passed through a locked door. You can’t keep Jesus out. This is what St. Thomas was getting at when he described the resurrected body. That resurrected body of Christ is not just that physical body that we have – a material body. By the Resurrection, it has been combined with the Spirit of God to make a unique human. It’s a spiritual-like body; He can do things that a physical body can do, but, also that a spiritual body can do. They’re combined, but, the spiritual body has been given authority or priority over material. He can walk through walls. He can ascend to Heaven and fly. He can bilocate. He can travel great distances in an instant.

The four Gospel narratives of the Resurrection: if you look at them, they’re all a little bit different. They don’t line up. In one, the angel is in the tomb, in another, the angel is on top of the tomb. In one, three people show up, in another only two are there. Then in another, they show up pretty early in the morning when it’s light and in another when it’s darker. So atheists and seculars will look at the texts and say “Look – You Christians can’t even get your story straight. There are four stories and they don’t add up. The Resurrection can’t be true.”
And, that’s the point! After the Resurrection, Jesus is no longer confined to Time and Space. He doesn’t have to do things like we do by process, by moving from Point A to B. There’s no messing around with motion and locality because he’s not bound by these things because of the Subtlety of his resurrected Body. He is Spiritualized. There are four Events, but, only one Reality.

Our Gospel today gives us an image of the situation we’re all in today. The Coronavirus and the lockdown. What we see in the Gospel is the Apostles locked in a room, they’re afraid, they’re uncertain about the future. Some of them are beginning to doubt God, wondering where he’s at or what happened. Doubt is a human thing that happens to all of us.

The thing I’d like to point out about this image is that we’re all locked in feeling cut off from the Sacraments. We’re cut off from the Body of Christ. We’re feeling cut off from our spiritual routines. Jesus goes through those boundaries. He goes through the bureaucratic red tape. What I mean by that is that Jesus as God is not bound by the Sacraments. The Catechism says this. We are bound by the Sacraments, but God isn’t. And he can pass through these things constructed by human beings that are getting in the way to give us His divine mercy. He does this in the Gospel today. He blows upon the Apostles and says, “Peace be with you.”

Today that divine mercy is still available to all of us even when we can’t go to Confession. It is a little different than saying you are going to get a Sacramental Absolution. But, you can still get Divine Mercy when you make that special prayer today.

In Western Theology, the Roman Catholic Church focused a lot on Jesus’ resurrected body. He actually died and rose from the dead, they see the empty tomb, they focus on Jesus coming back to life. In the Eastern Orthodox theology, they focus more on the cosmic dimension of the Resurrection. The say yes, He rose from the dead, but, in Jesus, all of creation will arise. What I’m getting at here is that before the split in 1054, before there became Roman Catholicism and Orthodox, we shared common theology and common beliefs. Saints that were writing about the cosmic resurrection were some of our Saints.

So this heritage we have of the cosmic dimension of the Resurrection is very important for us today. Why? Because of a new creation. The Resurrection means no more disease, no more suffering, no more death. Everything is made new. This takes place at the Micro level; viruses, bacteria, cancer and infections – all those nasty little things we can’t see. And on the Macro level; volcanoes, comets, earthquakes. All of those things will become done away-with and become new. The cosmic dimension of the Resurrection means that all the nasty things in life that we don’t like about creation will be gone and we will only be left with the good, the true, the beautiful. And there will be a constant state of perfection and life and vitality that will not change and will not know any scarcity.

I’ll close with an image that has been nurturing me – an image of restarting your computer. A good analogy for the Resurrection. Your computer is getting slow, maybe it’s frozen, maybe your settings aren’t where you want them to be; they’re thrown off. All you have to do is hit that little Restart button. And in an instant, everything is back to normal. It’s running faster, your settings are reset. That’s the Resurrection. Everything is back to the way it’s supposed to be.

But, something even better happens. Not only is your computer reset, but you discover it is a brand new, state-of-the-art MacBook or PC or whatever you are into. The Resurrection isn’t just restoration, but, it’s also the glorification, the divinization of all the cosmos.