

Where's the Body?!
3rd Sunday of Easter - May 8, 2011
Luke 24:12-35

In the days after the execution of a man deemed a political and spiritual threat to the world, some people were angry or disheartened. Some were gleeful. Some were glad that a distasteful job had been well done, and that a menace had been removed. And some immediately discerned a conspiracy. "There's no body. Show us the body."

And no, I'm *not* talking about Osama bin Laden!

Of course, there *are* some weird parallels. During the week, I watched a CNN interview in the Mideast. Almost everyone asked, "Where's the body? Show us the body. All we have is a tale told by American officials; who can believe *them*? They mention a firefight and a death; they repeat ever-changing stories told by crusader soldiers, if you can believe *them*; but we haven't seen a body." These folks seem convinced that bin Laden is as alive as he had been a week ago.

Now, let's switch to the story I *was* referring to. Imagine that CNN had interviewed Jesus' disciples in the first few days after His crucifixion and burial. They'd report that Jesus' followers, having accepted that He *had* died, subscribed to the truth that dead bodies

universally tend to remain dead. What they *couldn't* believe was the rumor that he'd *risen!* Imagine Wolf Blitzer with Cleopas and his pal.

"Where's the body? Show us the body. All we have is a tale told by some women; who can believe *them?* They mention an empty tomb, and repeat a few brief words announced by angels, if you can believe *that;* but Him they did not see." Cleopas and his friend seem convinced Jesus was as dead as he'd been on Friday afternoon!

You've heard the debate over releasing photos of bin Laden's body. You've heard from those who insist that photos can easily be Photo-Shopped. You've heard about fingerprints; DNA documentation; interviews with those who survived the raid, including a wife - like, who'd believe *her.* No matter what evidence is gathered or released, some people will refuse to believe it *because they cannot or will not believe the truthfulness and integrity of the person presenting it.*

What do you believe? Whom do you trust?

We constantly ask that. Folks who work for intelligence-gathering or -interpreting agencies constantly face a dilemma as they ponder mountains of data. Email inboxes fill with virus warnings that usually turn out to be hoaxes. Pithy quotes are passed around on Facebook: I was fooled by one this week. Workplace rumors and neighborhood gossip make whole-nine-yard stories out of silly-millimeter facts.

Even in scientific research, we don't only rely on the universality of a theorem, the ingenuity of an experiment, or the reliability of the instruments. Our certainty rests also on the specialized knowledge, judgment, and integrity of those who frame the questions, build the equipment, do the investigations, and interpret the results.

What do you believe? Whom do you trust?

Those questions are even more crucial for unique, unrepeatable events. We *can't* be present for or comprehend every historical event. We constantly rely on the trustworthiness of other human beings: their insight, testimony, and integrity. Did that event *really* happen? Did it happen the way supposed eyewitnesses describe it? What biases skew their testimony? Why should we believe anything that *we* can't see or verify directly? Why should we believe *this* person, but not *that* one? What *do* we believe? Whom *do* we trust? And *why*?

It's amazing how much of life, including historical, scientific, and economic stuff, is based on questions of faith. Faith is the act of relying on, betting your life on the trustworthiness of something or someone. Faith isn't just for the openly religious; it's universal. Even people who say, "Trust no one" presume that you'll trust the trustworthiness of that statement!

But what's the *basis* for trust? Part of an answer is this: people who consistently tell the truth; keep their word; and fulfill promises, no matter what the personal cost, are trustworthy. We learn that as teenagers when we're given curfews. We practice it with friends and family. We rely on it from our doctor. We're may be startled when it's displayed by used car dealers or politicians. And we often find it difficult to believe that our adversaries are trustworthy. *Like who could believe them?* They probably say the same about us.

When it comes to ultimate matters: life, death, sin, forgiveness and redemption, it's the same only more so. Whoever consistently tells us the truth about *these* things, whoever consistently keeps their word and fulfills their promises, no matter the personal cost, is worthy of our trust, in life and in death; is worthy of being worshipped as God.

We had hoped that He was the Messiah promised to Israel. The sorrow that Cleopas and his friend felt was painful enough. But Jesus' death seemed a sign that God could not be trusted. His word might not be worth the parchment it was written on. He might not make good on His promises. *He might not be able to.* So as they recalled Jesus' words that he would suffer, die, and rise again, is it any wonder that they might ask, "Where's the body? Dead or alive, *where is the body?!*" *Because without the Body of Christ made manifest, how could they believe? And whom could they ever trust?*

That's a common theme in post-Resurrection stories: *Where's the body?* How can we believe that this person standing before us *isn't* a gardener, impostor, or ghost? Dare we trust in God if Jesus remains dead? Thomas insisted that there had to be what CSI fans call a reliable chain of custody, to guarantee that there was no bodily bait and switch. And Jesus understood this. He did whatever His followers needed (and could bear!) to convince them that it was He, however glorified His body now was. He permitted them to touch Him. He ate with them. He breathed on them. He spoke to them, using familiar words and themes. He took, blessed, broke, and gave bread to them.

In a beautiful turn of phrase, St. Paul said that Jesus is the *Yes* to all of God's promises. In equally eloquent words, St. John writes of *what we had seen and heard, looked at with our own eyes, and touched, concerning the One who is the Word of Life*. Jesus, in His Body, was the full, final, and glorious *Yes*, assuring us of God's trustworthiness. We can bet our lives on Him. We can believe what He says. We can trust Him, in life and in death. Not to the bottom of the deep blue sea, but into hell itself went Jesus - body and soul; and unlike anyone else in history, *He came back - body and soul*. Show me the body? *You bet*.

Our Gospel story ends with Cleopas and his companion describing how Jesus made Himself known to them *in the breaking of the bread*. Jesus knew what He was doing. *Show me the Body*. Just a few nights

before, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them saying, *This IS my Body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of Me.* He does it again and again after His resurrection. It's as if He thereby says, *this* is how you will always and forever know that I am here, in the flesh, come hell or high water, come death or the devil. I'll do better than show you the Body. I will give it to you. No - more. I will unite you with it. I will *incorporate* you into my Body.

I like word plays, and I've given you a couple to use in responding to the challenge of the world's questions: Where's the body? Show us the body. What may we believe? Whom may we trust?

When part of a body is broken off, whether it's a leg, arm, or even head, we say it's *dismembered*. He took, blessed... broke... gave... this is My Body... Do this for the REmembrance of Me. Sharing this meal, we don't just recall something *about* Jesus. Through the power of the Spirit, we re-flesh Jesus' body, here on earth. We're *incorporated* into it. *That* word comes from *corpus*: body, and, yes, corpse. But the *living* Jesus has filled us with the *living* Spirit of His presence. We *become His living Body in the world*, so that *we* become *His* answer to the world's question, "Where is the body? Show me the body!"

And yes, that Body is wounded, even broken, in this broken and sin-scarred world. That's both a scandal and a strange necessity. The

Church, which is Christ's Body, wounded to death yet full of life, is what the world needs, *and is all the world can bear*, of His presence before He comes in glory to judge the living and the dead. The Church, feeding on Jesus' forgiveness and sharing it; healing under His touch, and passing that healing to others; crucified by His Word of Law, being raised to new life by His Word of Gospel, and speaking both to the world, *is the Body of Christ in and for the world.*

What can you believe? Whom can you trust? Ultimately, Christ alone. He's the only One who has kept every single promise. He's the only One who can produce a Body that's broken down the gates of hell rather than be found untrustworthy. So we're in way over our heads, you might say. Way above our pay grades. Because every single day, with every breath we take, every word we speak, every action we perform, as individual members and as the Church *we are showing His Body to people who desperately need to know there is One in whom they can trust. There is One with words they can believe. There is One on whom they can bet their lives, come hell or high water.*

Whenever we eat of *this* bread, and drink of *this* cup, we show forth the Lord's death - until He comes. We show forth His Yes. We show forth His Body. We show forth His trustworthiness for all people, in every place and every time. For Christ *is* risen. Alleluia!