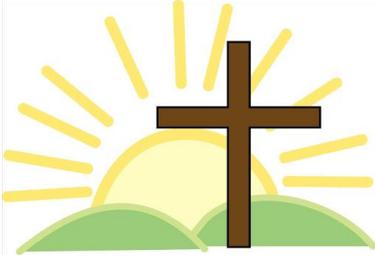


## Homily for 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter



There is that moment in films where one side of the couple takes the glasses off the other and then suddenly realises the other person is beautiful.

It has to be said it is often the man taking the glasses off the girl, though you could count Lois Lane taking the glasses off Clark Kent a move in the opposite direction. But this is all part of how we portray what is beautiful in people. We have possibly taken the idea of ‘how people should look’ to an extreme now, and it is a very superficial view.

In ‘The Elephant Man’ film, the make-up to get John Hurt looking almost inhuman as an elephant man to many people took seven hours to apply each time. During the film a couple do take him in but he is regularly put on show by others who use him to make money and at one point in the film he shouts out: “I am not an elephant! I am not an animal! I am a human being! I ... am ... a ... man!”

Fortunately today we have got beyond walking round Bedlam to look at those with mental illnesses, or watching executions for pleasure, but there is still an element within us or among us that cannot help staring at what we think is odd, or people we think are different, or even commiserating with people because they are with someone who seems ‘different.’

In the gospel of Luke, much more so than Matthew and Mark, and, for different reasons, than John, Jesus is very keen to explain to the disciples that he is still a real human being after the resurrection. Now the main reason for this is his desire to show that even though he is clearly different, not many of us can walk through doors or just appear in rooms, he wants them to know that his story is continuing. That his life is going on in a new way now, but that he is the same person who has been walking with them for three years and doing the incredible stuff they have seen, but more importantly he is the same person they saw die on the cross. The life he is offering them is beyond their earlier comprehension, and it is not something limited to our perception of what is possible in this world.

If they do not get to grasp this new understanding of what life is about, then they can never fully be his followers, never be able to be the

witnesses he is speaking about at the end of today's gospel, which he is asking us to be as well.

So the joy the disciples have is rooted in this new vision of life. But it must also affect how we look at life in general and in the world. It must get us to see beyond the superficial, 'the taking off the glasses' approach to what is beautiful, and get us to see that all life is beautiful. Jesus appears with his wounds after the resurrection. His view of what is perfect is nothing to do with outward appearance. In fact I would go so far as to say that he sees difference as something that enhances beauty; that our individuality, however that may be expressed, inwardly or outwardly, is a vital part of life. Sometimes our difference makes us initially hard to communicate with perhaps, or even limits us from doing certain things. Sometimes it means we need more care. Sometimes we can be inconvenient in a world that values convenience over so much else.

But often our special beauty, and we all have it, means that the world has to reassess its own values. The world can say to us, 'Wouldn't it have been better if...' or 'I think it is going to be too difficult...' even 'You are going to be too difficult...' The world can tell us that we will not manage, which means in fact that the world cannot manage us or hasn't the patience. That is why we tuck some people away, because we become easier to manage where we are hidden, or kept in one place.

There is a one line in the first reading, 'You have killed the prince of life...' Of course this means Jesus in the story, but it also means that our world can be too ready to deal with life only on the basis of what is acceptable to us, with what can be our narrow opinions of what life should be or how it can be lived. We are metaphorically, or even actually, ready on occasion to accept, and say to ourselves, that it is better if this or that life is curtailed, that it can be killed. But it is not actually our decision to make, it is God's, the author, the prince of life.

Charles de Gaulle, in different circumstances to this, shouted in Quebec, 'Vive la difference.' We should shout that about life, and help the difference to be lived and loved. The world's awakening to this is part of the power of the resurrection.