

## Historic Commentary

(Third Sunday of Easter - Year B)



The Liturgy Letter

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### Commentary on Luke 24:36-48 from Selected Church Fathers

[Thomas Aquinas' curated commentary on Luke 24](#), from a 13th century document called the [Catena Aurea](#) that contains compiled verse by verse commentary on the Gospels from the Patristics and others.

[Venerable Bede](#): First, we must note and diligently remember that the Lord condescended to stand in the middle of his disciples who were speaking around him and to reveal his presence in a vision of himself. This is what he promised elsewhere to all the faithful, saying, "Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst." In order to strengthen the steadfastness of our faith, which the presence of the divine benevolence always brings, he wished sometimes to show this by the presence of a physical vision of himself. Although we are lying far below the apostles' feet, in our case we must trust that this same thing happens to us by his mercy. He is in our midst as often as we come together and gather in his name. His name is Jesus, that is, "Savior." When we come together to speak about receiving our eternal salvation, it is undoubtedly true that we are gathered in the name of Jesus. It is not permissible to doubt that he is present among us as we are talking about the things that he himself loves. The more truly he is present, the better we retain in a more perfect heart what we profess with our mouth.

[Venerable Bede](#): We must also see that when the Savior appeared to his disciples, he immediately imposed on them the joys of peace. He repeated that same thing that is a part of the celebrated glory of immortality that he gave as a special pledge of salvation and life when he was about to go to his passion and death. "Peace I leave to you. My peace I give you." The angels seen soon after he was born also proclaimed the grace of this favor to the shepherds, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." Certainly the entire divinely arranged plan of our Redeemer's coming in the flesh is the reconciliation of the world. For this purpose, he became incarnate, suffered and was raised from the dead. He did this to lead us, who had incurred God's anger by sinning, back to God's peace by his act of reconciliation. The prophet correctly gave him the names "Father of the world to come" and "Prince of Peace." The apostle also wrote about him to those from among the nations who had believed. He said, "Coming, he brought the good news of peace to you who were from far off and peace to those who were near, since through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father."

**Ambrose:** Persuaded by so many examples of virtue, we believe that Peter could not have doubted. It is also clear that John believed when he saw the Savior. He had already believed when he saw the tomb empty of its body. Why then does Luke say that they were troubled? First, the saying of a majority includes the opinion of the few. Second, although Peter had believed the resurrection, he could be troubled when he saw that the Lord appeared unexpectedly in his body in a room where the doors were bolted and the walls solid. Luke pursued details historically. One contemplated the end, and the other the course of events. By saying, "Then he opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures," he also declares that the disciples believed.

**Cyril of Alexandria:** To convince them firmly and absolutely that he is the same one who suffered, he immediately shows that being God by nature, he knows what is hidden. The tumultuous thoughts within them do not escape him. He said, "Why are you troubled?" This is a very clear proof that the one they see before them is not some other person. He is the same one whom they saw suffering death upon the cross and laid in the tomb, even the one who sees mind and heart and from whom nothing that is in us is hid. He gives this to them as a sign: his knowledge of the tumult of thoughts that was within them. In another way, he proves that death is conquered and that human nature has put off corruption in him. He shows his hands, his feet and the holes of the nails. He permits them to touch him and in every way convince themselves that the very body that suffered was risen. Let no one quibble at the resurrection. Although you hear the sacred Scripture say that the human body is sown a physical body but raised a spiritual body, do not deny the return of human bodies to incorruption.

**Leo the Great:** The resurrection of the Lord was truly the resurrection of a real body, because no other person was raised than he who had been crucified and died. What else was accomplished during that interval of forty days than to make our faith entire and clear of all darkness? For a while, he spoke with his disciples and remained with them, ate with them and allowed himself to be felt with careful and inquisitive touch by those who were under the influence of doubt. This was his purpose in going in to them when the doors were shut. He gave them the Holy Ghost by his breath. After giving them the light of intelligence, he opened the secrets of holy Scripture. In his same person, he showed them the wound in the side, the prints of the nails and all the fresh tokens of the passion. He said, "See my hands and feet. It is I myself. Handle me and see. A spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see that I have." He did all this so that we might acknowledge that the properties of the divine and the human nature remain in him without causing a division. We now may know that the Word is not what the flesh is. We may now confess that the one Son of God is Word and flesh.

**Augustine:** While they were still flustered for joy, they were rejoicing and doubting at the same time. They were seeing and touching, and scarcely believing. What a tremendous favor grace has done us! We have neither seen nor touched, and we have believed. While they were still flustered for joy, he said, "Have you got here anything to eat? Certainly you can believe that I am alive and well if I join you in a meal." They offered him what they had: a portion of grilled fish. Grilled fish means martyrdom, faith proved by fire. Why is it only a portion? Paul says, "If I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain

nothing.” Imagine a complete body of martyrs. Some suffer because of love, while others suffer out of pride. Remove the pride portion, offer the love portion. That is the food for Christ. Give Christ his portion. Christ loves the martyrs who suffered out of love.

Cyril of Alexandria: To produce in them a more firmly settled faith in his resurrection, he asked for something to eat. They brought a piece of broiled fish, which he took and ate in the presence of them all. He did this only to show them that the one risen from the dead was the same one who ate and drank with them during the whole previous period of time when he talked with them as a man, according to the prophet’s voice. He intended them to perceive that the human body certainly does need sustenance of this kind but a spirit does not.... The power of Christ surpasses human inquiry. It is not on the level of the understanding of ordinary events. He ate a piece of fish because of the resurrection. The natural consequences of eating by no means followed in the case of Christ, as the unbeliever might object, knowing that whatsoever enters the mouth must necessarily come out into the drain. The believer will not admit these quibbles into his mind but leaves the matter to the power of God.

When he restrained their thoughts by what he said, by the touch of their hands and by sharing food, he then opened their minds to understand that he had to suffer, even on the wood of the cross. The Lord reminds the disciples of what he said. He had forewarned them of his sufferings on the cross, according to what the prophets had long before spoken. He also opens the eyes of their hearts for them to understand the ancient prophecies.

Augustine: What did he tell them from the Scriptures? He said, “Repentance and forgiveness of sins should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” The disciples could not see this. They could see Christ talking about the church that would be. When Christ said something they could not see, they believed him. They could see the head, but they could not yet see the body. We can see the body, but we believe about the head. They are two: husband and wife, head and body, Christ and the church. He showed himself to the disciples and promised them the church. He showed us the church and ordered us to believe about himself. The apostles saw one thing, but they did not see the other. We also see one thing and do not see the other. Having the head there with them, they believed about the body. Having the body here with us, we should believe about the head.

Augustine: The Lord did not only shed his blood, but he also applied his death to the preparation of the cure. He rose again to present us with a sample of resurrection. He suffered with patience all his own to teach us the patience we should have. In his resurrection, he showed us the reward of patience. As you know and we all confess, he ascended into heaven, and then he sent the Holy Spirit as he had previously promised. You remember that he said to his disciples, “Stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” His promise came true. The Holy Spirit came, he filled the disciples, and they started speaking with the tongues of all nations. A sign of unity was enacted in them. One person spoke then in all languages, because the unity of the church was going to speak in all languages.

Venerable Bede: The preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins through confession of Christ's name appropriately started from Jerusalem. The first root of faith in him would be brought out where the splendor of his teaching and virtues, the triumph of his passion, the joy of his resurrection and ascension were accomplished. The first shoot of the blooming church, like some kind of great vine, would be planted. By an increase in the spreading of the Word, the church would extend the branches of its teaching into the whole wide world. The prophecy of Isaiah would be brought to fulfillment. He said, "The law will go forth from Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem, and he will judge the nations and convict many peoples." It was appropriate that the preaching of repentance and the forgiveness of sins, good news to be proclaimed to idolatrous nations and those defiled by various evil deeds, should start from Jerusalem. Perhaps some of the nations, thoroughly terrified by the magnitude of Jerusalem's offenses, might doubt the possibility of obtaining pardon if it performed fruits worthy of repentance. He granted pardon even to those at Jerusalem who had blasphemed and crucified the Son of God.

Cyril of Alexandria: The Savior promises the disciples the descent of the Holy Spirit, which God announced of old by Joel. He also promises power from above, so that they might be strong, invincible and fearlessly preach the divine mystery to people everywhere. He says to them that they received the Spirit after the resurrection, "Receive the Holy Spirit." He adds, "Wait for the promise of the Father, which you heard from me, for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." It will not be in water any longer, because they already had received that, but it will be with the Holy Spirit. He does not add water to water but completes that which was deficient by adding what it lacked.