

Have you anything to eat? Luke 24:41

When as a child I first heard my religion teacher tell us we each had a soul, I could only imagine it having the shape of the sole of my shoe, except it was white. Kind of oval and colorless and residing in my torso – to exit after my death, unimpeded by my earthbound, tired, mortal body. Later my image of the soul became a white dove. This was influenced by the image of the Holy Spirit descending as a dove upon Jesus at his baptism, something capable of flight, light of weight, at home in the higher regions of this world – not earthbound like material things.

Which brings to mind the popular story of Jonathan Livingstone Seagull – in the 1970's – in which a seagull, weary of flying close to the sand and sea and fighting over scraps to eat, longs to take off and fly high, free of earthbound conformity. And so he practices flying at higher levels and faster speeds until he feels he is leaving even his light body behind – soaring as fast as thought – until: *he knew with practiced ease that he was not bone and feather but a perfect idea of freedom and flight, limited by nothing at all.* The film critic Roger Ebert, (who once referred to himself as *Catholic lock, stock and barrel*) summed the film up as *the biggest . . . metaphysical rip-off of the year.*

But hasn't that ambition for speed, for transcending the limits of our bodies, of earth itself been characteristic of our past century? Ever since a philosopher said *I think, therefore I am* we have been living in a culture of mind over matter. Matter exists only to be exploited by our ideas, our mental powers, abstract math. True, our health care systems have advanced our longevity beyond what was once imaginable. Yet never before have bodies been so expendable – judging by the casualties of modern war, military and civilian (let's *not* forget the civilians); the collisions and crashes of modern velocity, the rapid firepower of modern weapons, . . . And, should we let lose science's gift to humanity of nuclear power, will any-body not be bodily consumed?

And yet at Easter we Christians affirm our belief in the resurrection of the body, the body of Christ and our own *physical* as much as *spiritual* destiny! We relish Ezekiel's vision of dry bones coming together clickety clack and taking on flesh again. And we believe that even God became flesh, became bodily in Christ and walked among us and bled and writhed on a cross – as any authentic body would.

May not our belief in our bodily as well as soulful destiny after death have something to do with the fact that we cannot even think or imagine *without* a body? We are not simply a matter of *I think, therefore I am*. Our bodies are thoroughly a part of our thinking process. When I think, I also feel. Desire, longing compel me to think, to speculate. Certain ideas *excite* me, make me joyful, others sad, my features frown. I cannot know anything without some emotion being engaged. Take for example an interview requiring that I be intelligible. What do I do? I sweat! If hired, I leap for joy, otherwise: crestfallen. If I resort to poetry to express my thoughts, I bring into play my tongue, my larynx, my senses, gestures . . . In other words, we are not and will never be *whole* human beings if we don't have some kind of body to share whatever our souls encounter hereafter.

Which is why I like that passage in Luke's Gospel where the risen Jesus appears to his disciples and they are all adither – yet Jesus, after what he has been through, simply says, "Have you anything to eat?" He's hungry!! He has risen from the dead, *body* and soul and wants something to eat! So we *also* cling to our having some kind of post-mortem *bodily* destiny ourselves. Who wants to be a ghost? A no-body?