

Third Sunday of Easter April 30, 2017

Readings: Acts 2:14a.22-23; 1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35

As we journey through life with all its problems and distractions we can certainly lose our perspective. We can lose all direction to life and left to ourselves we become nothing and remain with uncertainty. Any positive support, a sincere understanding can place a person on the right path. This is what the readings of today tell us that hope will come when we expect little. Human hope is a fragile thing and when it withers it's difficult to revive. Hopelessness as a disease of the human spirit is desperately hard to cure. Today God challenges us to meet the Risen Christ who comes to us in ordinary life situations. All of the Easter accounts suggest that Christ comes to us in the places where we live our lives. It is easy to mistake the presence of the Lord like Mary for a gardener, Peter as a man on the beach, Cleopas and his companion while at meal. Easter comes and gives us a fresh chance to believe and live in a new exciting way. The Easter story and the story of the Emmaus journey hover around us all the time. God never forces himself on us, but Christ joins us in a walk in the garden or a visit with a friend or while sorrowing at the death of a friend or watching the beautiful scenery or reading a consoling letter from a friend. God speaks to us in the voices of those who are hurt or are sorrowful, in the faces of the poor and the needy, in the victims of prejudice and the generosity of those who care, in an ordinary meal and particularly in the Eucharist. Peter in the first reading gives hope to people telling them that even though they killed Jesus, God has raised him up. In the second reading Peter reminds the Christians that Jesus through his blood has paid the ransom for us and the saving hope is given to us.

The First Reading of today taken from the Acts of the Apostles tells us about Peter who stood along with the eleven on the day of Pentecost and affirmed that Jesus had been raised from the dead. He explained to the crowds that Jesus who had been handed over to those who crucified Him outside of the law according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. Now God had raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for Him to be held in its power. Speaking to the people of Judea and all who lived in Jerusalem, Peter quoted the words of king David in Psalm 16, "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence." This

message of Peter was a call to penance and conversion. However, on behalf of God, it was a message of love, mercy and forgiveness. Addressing some of those who had killed Jesus, the only begotten Son of God, Peter expressed that the Lord would forgive them if they had a change of heart. God would welcome as His children all those who would embrace the truth, believing that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah and Savior.

Today's Second Reading from the First Letter of Peter echoes the spiritual knowledge, understanding and wisdom that Peter received by the grace of God. To him was given an in-depth perception of the redemptive plan of God. Writing to the Gentile Christians who lived in the northern and eastern part of Asia Minor, Peter urges them to be faithful to their calling, reminding them that they are "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation." The Gentile believers were reminded that God has specially chosen them in Christ. He tells them to invoke the Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds during their earthly exile. Their conduct should shine in obedience. Peter reminds them that they were ransomed from the fruitless way of their ancestors, not by gold or silver, but by the precious Blood of Christ, the perfect Lamb that was without defect or blemish. Before creation, God foreknew that sin would enter the world and that Christ would redeem mankind. This knowledge has now been revealed to the world at the end of the ages for our sake. Through Jesus, we have come to set our faith and hope on God. For we know that the almighty God who raised Jesus from the dead and gave Him glory, in the most Holy Name of His Son, we shall also be raised from the dead and glorified according to our deeds.

In today's Gospel we have the story of two disciples who walked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. During their walk with the Lord their eyes were kept closed from recognizing him. But later that day, when Jesus was at table with them, he took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave the bread to them. At that moment, the eyes of the disciples were opened and they recognized Jesus just before he vanished from their sight. The Easter story and the story of the Emmaus journey hover around us all the time. It tells us that God never forces himself on us, but joins us in a walk in the garden or a visit of a friend or while sorrowing at the death of a friend or watching the beautiful scenery or reading a consoling letter from someone we love. God speaks to us in the voices of those who are hurt or are sorrowful, in the faces of the poor and the needy, in the victims of prejudice and the generosity of those who care, in an ordinary meal and especially in the Eucharist.

The story as given by Luke is very familiar to us. Two little known disciples, Cleopas and an unnamed disciple are trudging along the road towards Emmaus, a town located seven miles northwest of Jerusalem. Some speculate that the unknown disciple may have been Luke himself. It was the Day of the Resurrection, but these two wandering disciples did not grasp the entire situation. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that they are quite disillusioned. Like the other disciples, they did not clearly hear or fully understand Jesus' earlier predictions about His death and his resurrection. They were totally perplexed and confused and their hope was shattered. Disbelief has overpowered them. They are leaving Jerusalem and its disturbing events because for them, Jesus' death was an unmitigated tragedy. Now as they meet a stranger on the way and were surprised when this person expressed his ignorance of what had happened in Jerusalem. As they themselves were dejected and disillusioned at this time they chose to discuss the terrible events of the past few days with him. They told him about the crucified Jesus and how they had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. The stranger too clarified several things with them in a gentle way. Then Jesus takes the initiative and, in effect, begins to tell His own story. Exposing their lack of understanding and faith about the Messiah he tells them that he had to undergo all sufferings before entering his glory. He reviews the Old Testament and the tradition to show that the Jerusalem events were in reality his triumph over death to attain his glory.

At this point in the journey, they are near Emmaus, their destination. When Jesus acts as if he were going farther, they earnestly invite him to join them for the dinner and spend the night with them. He had shared his story with them and now they offer him hospitality. They opened their hearts to Him in love, and, when they are seated at table, Jesus responds in love. At the table fellowship, the two disciples recognize that the Stranger is, in fact, a dear friend. For, when Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and distributes it to them, their eyes are opened to recognize the Lord. He immediately vanishes from their sight. Their first reaction is to acknowledge that their hearts were burning as he explained the Scriptures to them. The fire had not altogether been extinguished by the disillusioning events of the previous week. The disciples are now meeting the third mode of Jesus' presence, namely the Eucharist, in the sharing of the meal. Hastening to Jerusalem, the two men carried the news to the other disciples. They spread the fire in their hearts to the Eleven and the others assembled there. Here they learn that their experience of the risen Lord is not unique. Peter had also seen Him. They review what happened on their journey and, especially, how they

came to recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread. It is one of thirteen stories we know of Jesus reappearing after he has been raised from the dead.

The journey to Emmaus begins in blindness, gloom, disillusionment and despair. It ends with the warming of the disciples' hearts, the opening of their eyes, and their return to Jerusalem. It begins with the shattering of an immature faith and ends with the disciples giving witness to a mature faith. Their story now is a new one—a story filled with life and hope. In fact, the story of Emmaus is walking and waiting, whether we are still grieving someone lost who was dear to us and we wonder when if ever we will feel happy again. Emmaus again is wherever we meet the Risen Christ in ordinary moments and Easter comes to dwell in us. It was here in Emmaus that on the day of the resurrection Jesus appeared to the two disciples and yet, faith eluded them till he really showed himself in the Eucharist. The Emmaus story helps us understand the Lord's presence where, often before, we had experienced His absence. In light of the Emmaus story, all of us come to recognize that we do not walk alone. Jesus is with us. Through his word He helps us keep on the right path. Through the breaking of bread each day he feeds the deepest hungers of our heart and spirit. This story can also be seen as symbolic of the Eucharist. The disciples encounter Jesus on the way. They express their disillusionment and sense of helplessness as they walk the road to nowhere. Jesus then breaks open the Scriptures, explains its full meaning with regard to him and leaves their hearts on fire with evangelizing enthusiasm. He tells them about himself and his own sacrifice. Then in the breaking of the one loaf of bread the community recognizes the living presence of the Lord. Finally, there is the urge to go and share the experience of knowing and loving Jesus and inviting others to share that experience.

To sum up then what this story seems to be telling us that life is a journey and Jesus is the Way we are called to follow. It seems at times that we are alone but Jesus is with us at all times and in all situations. We need to be ready to recognize him entering our lives so that we can respond appropriately to Him. Jesus wants to communicate with us and he speaks to us and is truly present in the Scriptures. They must be an integral part of every disciple's life. We pray that they may set our hearts on fire. More specifically, Jesus is present among us in all our sacramental celebrations but especially in the Eucharist. Our sharing of this Bread is a symbol of our unity as brothers and sisters in Jesus. It is also a symbol of our participation in the work and mission of Jesus, whose body was broken in the love and service of others. In the Eucharist he shares himself with us and becomes

food and drink. In the breaking of bread he unites the Christian community into his Body. Our experience of loving and being loved by Jesus makes us to share that experience with others to help them walk the Way of Jesus, which is the Way of Truth and Life. He transforms us as his messengers in the world of today.

God challenges us to meet the Risen Christ who comes to us in ordinary life situations. The disciples of Emmaus were given a lesson on scriptures. It is in Scripture that we also meet God and Jesus. Scripture is the Word of God and through it he communicates himself to us. Jesus shows them the scriptures and all the happenings which to them looked like a total failure but in reality a stepping stone to his triumph and glory. All of the Easter accounts suggest that Christ comes to us in the places where we lead our lives. Persons like Mary, Peter, Cleopas and his companion discover him in a personal way. Recognizing him hinges on obedience. The Easter story and the story of the Emmaus journey hover around us all the time. God never forces himself on us, but joins us in a walk in the garden or in the visit of a friend or while sharing the sorrow of a friend or watching the beautiful scenery or reading a consoling letter from someone we love. God speaks to us in the voices of those who are hurt or are sorrowful, in the faces of the poor and the needy, in the victims of prejudice and the generosity of those who care. We may miss him if we do not look for him where Cleopas and his friend found him – in things as ordinary as a meal and in the Eucharist.

The Catalina Island is twenty-one miles away from the coast of California, and many people have taken the challenge to swim across it. On July 4th 1952, Florence Chadwick stepped into the water off Catalina Island to swim across to the California coast. She started well and on course, but later fatigue set in, and the weather became cold. She persisted, but fifteen hours later, numb and cold, she asked to be taken out of the water. After she recovered, she was told that she had been pulled out only half a mile away from the coast. She commented that she could have made it, if the fog had not affected her vision and she would have just seen the land. She promised that this would be the only time that she would ever quit. She went back to her rigorous training. And two months later she swam that same channel. The same thing happened. The fatigue set in, and the fog obscured her view, but this time she swam with faith and vision of the land in her mind. She knew that somewhere behind the fog was land. She succeeded and became the first woman to swim the Catalina Channel. She even broke the men's record by two hours. When you set your goal, keep pressing on even when you

are tired, physically and mentally, and even though there are many challenges ahead. Keep the vision of your goal crystal clear before you and never give up!

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