

Homily of Third Sunday of Easter Year A, 2023

Acts 2:14, 22-33; Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-11; 1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35

After Jesus rose from the dead, he began to appear to his disciples. They experienced him and the transforming power of his resurrection. We pray that we, too, may have the same experience. We pray with St. Paul, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by being conformed to his death" (Philippians 3:10).

Before Jesus's appearances to his apostles, they locked themselves up in a room "for fear of the Jews" (John 20:19). We remember how Peter, crippled by fear, denied Jesus three times. Peter said in his third denial, "I do not know the man" (Matthew 26:74). But the first reading shows a new Peter who was transformed by the power of Jesus' resurrection. He was delivered from his fear. He proclaimed the Risen Lord without fear. He accused the Jews, openly, of killing Jesus and cautioned them to repent from their sinful ways. The story of Peter is a story of hope. It is an encouraging story. We pray that as Easter people, we are transformed and overcome all that holds us down. Let us bring to Jesus all our fears.

The second reading reminds us that the blood of Christ has ransomed us from our futile conduct. Another translation calls futile conduct empty way of life. We are invited to examine ourselves and bring to Jesus our un-ransomed futile conduct (empty way of life). They are engagements and behaviors that lead to wrong ways instead of right ways. They are engagements and behaviors that are spiritually and worldly retrogressive instead of progressive. They are engagements and behaviors that lead us to sin instead of holiness. May Jesus deliver us from spiritual blindness and open the eyes of our minds so that we can discover the un-ransomed areas of our life and bring them to him. Jesus is waiting for you and for me. St. Peter reminds us, "The Lord does not delay his promise, as some regard 'delay,' but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

We read in today's gospel how two of Jesus' disciples, in disappointment and in despair, were heading back to their village, Emmaus. They had concluded that to have left everything and followed Jesus for three years had ended up in futility. No wonder they were downcast. Then, Jesus met them on their way. Three major events took place. First, Jesus fed them with the word of God to burn their hearts. Second, Jesus had a Eucharistic meal with them. The Eucharist opened their eyes, and they recognized Jesus. (This is what we do during Mass; we receive God's word, and we receive Christ's Body.) Third, the men were empowered by their encounter with Jesus. "So, they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem..." Remember that the men had advised 'the stranger' not to continue his journey, but to stay with them because it was nearly evening, and the day almost over. In other words, it was not safe to continue the journey at that time. However, after encountering Jesus, they were empowered, and they walked back to Jerusalem, about seven miles (eleven kilometers), that night to join the apostles and the other disciples. They were no longer afraid of the dangers of the night. This incident tells us a lot about the power of the word of God and the power of the Eucharist.

Do we notice what happened at the meal? The 'stranger,' Jesus, took control. "While he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them" (Luke 24:30). He took control of the word. He took control of the meal! May Jesus take control of our celebration.

One other lesson to learn from the two disciples is the essence of hospitality. Without being asked, the two men invited 'the stranger' to stay with them because it was getting late. They provided him accommodation and meal. We read in Hebrews 13:2, "Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels." This text reminds us of Genesis 18:1-15. God's promise of giving Abraham a son came to pass when Abraham and his wife, Sarah, showed hospitality to three strangers whom they did not know that they were angels. Hospitality opens up doors and windows of blessings.

There is no doubt that many people are sick, grieving, frightened, frustrated, downcast, despair, brokenhearted, confused, disappointed, hungry, and upset. Let us invite Jesus to take control of whatever that is going on with us. May we hear his word and let it burn our hearts. May the Eucharist we celebrate and receive transform us.

May Jesus grant healing to the sick, consolation to the grieving, strength to the frightened, guidance to the frustrated, joy to the downcast, hope to the despair, courage to the brokenhearted, insight to the confused, delight to the disappointed, food to the hungry, and peace to the upset. Amen.

Do not return to Emmaus. Remain in Jerusalem!

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