

3rd Sunday in Easter

(Year A)

<i>First Reading</i>	Acts 2:14, 22-33
<i>Response</i>	Lord, you will show us the path of life.
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11
<i>Second Reading</i>	1 Peter 1:17-21
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Lord Jesus, open the Scriptures to us; make our hearts burn while you speak to us.
<i>Gospel</i>	Luke 24:13-35

On the third Sunday in Easter the Church gives us another appearance of Christ in his risen body. It's one of the most famous stories, one of the most well-known and much loved stories of Christ appearing to his disciples. It is the famous road to Emmaus account. So we are going to be looking at that for the Gospel for this week. As I said before, during the Easter season we don't have an Old Testament reading, we have a reading from the book of Acts and then from the Gospel and one of the letters. So we are going to begin with the Gospel here. It is a little long, but it's a great story so what I am going to do is read through it and comment on it as we go and try to unpack this famous story of Jesus appearing on the road to Emmaus. It can be found in Luke 24:13 and following, and this is what the Gospel for this Sunday says:

That very day [meaning Easter Sunday] two of them were going to a village named Emma'us, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cle'opas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?"

And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.¹

Let's pause there for just a second. So notice a couple aspects about this opening part of the account. Number one, the disciples are on the road to a village named Emmaus that is outside of Jerusalem. So they are leaving the city and while they are leaving the city they are talking about everything that happened. Obviously the main topic of conversation here is going to be the passion and the death, the crucifixion of Jesus. And while they're doing that he appears, he drew near and went with them. And it says, number two, that their eyes were kept from recognizing him. That is very important. Sometimes people will say that they didn't recognize him, but it cannot be that they had forgotten what Jesus looked like. He was only crucified a couple days before. So it's not that they had forgotten what he looked like or that he somehow looked different, it says their eyes were kept from recognizing him. So what it is revealing to us here is that Jesus in a sense veils his identity. He appears to them but he does not allow them to recognize that it's really him.

The third thing, notice what happens here, he asks them "so what are you all talking about, what is this conversation?" And they "stood still looking sad." And it tells us that one of them was named Cleopas. Now who was Cleopas? Well, we know from the Gospel of John that Jesus had an uncle named Cleopas. John's Gospel tells us that at the foot of the cross was Mary and Mary's sister, the wife of Cleopas. So Cleopas was Jesus's uncle, he was a relative. In fact, if we read the early Church Fathers, they are going to tell us that he was the father of James and Simon and Jude, the men who were called Jesus' "brothers," his cousins, who went on to be bishops of Jerusalem. So Cleopas was a pretty important figure in the

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

early Church. It doesn't tell us who the other disciple is that he's walking with, but Cleopas is singled out here and he says to Jesus, "are you the only person who doesn't know what has happened in Jerusalem in these days." Now this is almost hilarious here because there is a great irony. Jesus is the only person in Jerusalem who knows exactly what has happened, that he has in fact redeemed the world through his passion and his death and his resurrection, but he doesn't shy Cleopas for making such a foolish mistake. He says "what things, tell me about them." And Cleopas goes on to say "well concerning Jesus of Nazareth" —and here is the other element that's really significant — he doesn't say concerning Jesus, the Messiah, or concerning Jesus, the son of God, or concerning Jesus, the one who is to come; he says concerning "Jesus, a prophet mighty in deed and word."

Notice what has happened to Cleopas' faith here. He's lost it, or at least he's reduced it to believing that Jesus was just a prophet, a mighty man sent from God performing signs and wonders, but not the Messiah. Why? Because he goes on to say "we had hoped [past tense] that he was the one to redeem Israel, but now it's the third day since he was put to death." In other words, there's no hope of that anymore. Now if we pick up then in verse 22 the story continues. Cleopas goes on to say:

Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see."

So Pause here. Now Cleopas brings up another dimension. He brings up the fact of the empty tomb. He is leaving Jerusalem, turning his back on the place where Jesus had died, turning his back on the hopes that they had, and going to Emmaus even though he knows about the empty tomb. The message of the empty tomb had been brought to them, and even the fact that the women had seen a vision of the

angels saying that Jesus was alive, and he still didn't believe. Once he says that, now Jesus responds with some very important words in verse 25:

And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

Pause there for just a second. There are a couple of aspects of what Jesus is doing here that are worth highlighting. Number one, notice he does upbraid them. He does rebuke them and he says "you foolish men, slow of heart to believe all the prophets have spoken." Now I remember years ago when I was doing a video on this — like a lecture — on the road to Emmaus, I made a mistake. I said that Jesus upbraided them for not knowing the Scriptures. And somebody came up to me after the talk and said "Dr. Pitre, I don't mean to be rude but I think you made a mistake. Jesus does not upbraid them for not knowing the Scriptures, he upbraids them for not believing the Scriptures." And that's true. That's exactly what he said. They, as Jews, they would've known the prophets. The problem is they don't believe. They are lacking faith. Now after rebuking them, Jesus doesn't leave them there. He doesn't just say "you fools" and then walk off. He meets them where they are in their brokenness and in their lack of faith and in their doubt that they had after the crucifixion, and he starts basically a Bible study, going all the way back to Genesis. "Beginning with Moses and the prophets, he interpreted to them in the Scriptures all the things concerning himself."

Now why is that so important? Well for me personally, one of the reasons this is important is because it gives me the model of how to do biblical studies, of how to teach about the Scriptures, to teach the word of God; which is this, always go back to the Old Testament. Always go back to the beginning. Always start with Genesis and walk through the Scriptures looking for the signs and the shadows that point forward to what God is going to do in Jesus Christ. In other words, Jesus'

method of interpreting the Scripture is you start with the Old Testament and you interpret it (what's called) typologically. Typology means the study of Old Testament prefigurations (events, realities, signs and things) that point forward to and are fulfilled in the New Testament, in the new covenant of Jesus — in his life, his, death and his resurrection.

That's how Jesus interpreted the Bible and one of the big problems we have today is that so many of us only read the New Testament. We start in the Gospels or we start in the New Testament and we never go back to the Old Testament. Because of that, we don't see the connections between the Old and the New Testament. We don't see how the New Testament is hidden in the Old and the Old is revealed in the New. That's what we need to see if we are going to have faith that Jesus isn't just one more messianic pretender, he isn't just one more religious leader making all kinds of wild claims about himself. His claims that he makes about himself are validated and vindicated by the prophecies of the Old Testament and the types of the Old Testament that he fulfills in himself — like being the new Adam or the new Moses or the new David — as we've seen in other Bible studies as we have gone through the liturgical year.

So this is something I am very passionate about, but I just wanted to highlight it for you. One of the reasons I pay attention to the Old Testament in my teaching is not just because I'm particularly interested in it, it is because that's how Jesus evangelized these disciples who had lost their faith in the face of the scandal of the cross. Now he doesn't stop there though because as you will see in the next couple verses, this is like a really good Bible study, and they don't want it to stop, so in verse 28 it says:

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent."

Pause there. Try to imagine what would that Bible study have been like. What would it have been like to walk with the risen Jesus and have him explain the

Scripture, to have him explain the Old Testament and how it pointed forward to him? I would give my — well maybe not my right arm because I use that for writing for — I would give my left arm to have been there and heard what he had to say, but we don't know what he talked about, we don't know what passages. We do know how they reacted though, which is that they were like “we don't want this to stop. Stay with us, it is evening and the day is now far spent.” So it continues:

So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Alright, pause there, there is so much going on here. Let's just walk through it really quick. First of all, notice here the setting. I just want to emphasize this again. When is all this happening? It is happening on the evening of Easter Sunday. So this is Easter Sunday evening. But secondly, notice Jesus' actions. When he sits at table with them he does four things. He took the bread, he blessed the bread, he broke the bread and he gave the bread. Now in Luke's Gospel when is the last time Jesus took the bread, blessed the bread, broke the bread and gave the bread? Those exact same four verbs occur at the Last Supper. So when Jesus does that, he is reenacting the same thing he did on Holy Thursday a few days before with the disciples in the upper room when he instituted the Eucharist, when he celebrated the Last Supper. And as soon as he does that, it says “their eyes were open and he vanished out of their site and they recognized him.” They recognized him in the breaking of the bread, so the question is why does Jesus vanish? Why does he disappear? Is it like a magic trick...now you see me, now you don't?

Why would he do that to them, especially when their words to him were “stay with us”?

I think the answer is simple but it's profound. Namely this, he is trying to get them to direct their eyes, their vision, to the way he's going to be with them from now on, which is in the Eucharist itself, in the breaking of the bread. In other words, he does answer their prayer when they asked him to stay with them. He does stay with them, but now he's going to remain with them in a different way. He is not going to be in his body in his local presence as he's been before in his earthly body. Now he's going to come to them under the appearance of the bread, under the appearance of the bread and wine, under the appearance of the Eucharist, so that he can be with them always, even to the end of time, but in a new form and in a way that he is not located or limited to one location, in one place. He can be in Emmaus. He can be in Jerusalem. He can be in Galilee. He can be in Rome. He can be in France. He can be in all these different places now in the breaking of the bread. So this is a revelation of the Eucharist. In a sense, what you could say is this is the first Mass that Jesus celebrates after the Last Supper. It's the first Mass after the resurrection, and these two choice disciples get to experience this in the fact that he is known to them in the breaking of the bread. Now you might think, “how is that even possible?” Think about it for just a second. In Jesus' risen body, he's no longer bound by space. In his glorified body, he is no longer bound by time. He can walk through walls, as we've seen him do elsewhere. He can hide his appearance, as we've seen him do at the beginning of this chapter. So in the Eucharist that's exactly what he's doing. He's coming to us, but he's hiding himself under the appearances of bread and wine. And that's what happens here on the road to Emmaus.

Now there is another aspect of this. So as you were reading through this you might've noticed here that there are really two movements to the way Jesus engages with these disciples. First, he reads the Scriptures to them, starting with the Old Testament, and he explains them. And then second, he sets a table, he takes the bread, he blesses, he prays, he breaks it and then he gives it to them. Do

those two movements sound familiar? Well yes, those are the two fundamental parts of the Mass. If you look at the Mass — the Catechism of the Catholic Church says this in paragraph 1346 — the fundamental structure of the Mass consists of two great parts. First, the liturgy of the word, where we have the gathering, the Scripture readings, the homily (the explanation) and the prayers of intercession. And then second, the liturgy of the Eucharist, where we have the offertory, the Eucharistic prayer and then of course the communion rite. So it's fascinating that even in the liturgy of the word what do we do? We go back to the Old Testament. We have the reading from the Old Testament and then we have a reading from New Testament letters and then the Gospel, and we see how the old prefigures the new and the new fulfills the old — exactly what Jesus did on the first Easter Sunday. So in a sense, every Sunday of the year in the Eucharistic liturgy, in the Mass — actually every day — we are reliving and participating in the mystery of Emmaus, that same experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. In fact the Catechism says this in paragraph 1347 about the Mass and the road to Emmaus:

Is this not the same movement as the Paschal meal of the risen Jesus with his disciples?

In other words, that twofold movement of word and sacrament is the same movement of the meal of the risen Jesus with his disciples on the road to Emmaus. I stress this for you also because sometimes, at least in my experience, there can be a temptation to check out during the Liturgy of the Word. In other words, “I came here to receive the Eucharist, so that's really what I'm here for,” and so when the readings start to be proclaimed I can kind of zone out, maybe get distracted; or when the homily is preached, I am drifting off, I am not paying attention. Well you are missing a fundamental part of the Mass. The only reason these disciples were able to see Jesus in the breaking of bread is because he already prepared their hearts by teaching them through the Word, by unpacking the Scriptures, by opening the Scriptures and leading them back to faith through the typology of the Old and New Testaments. That's what gave them faith in order to recognize him in

the mystery the breaking of bread. So we would do well to pay attention, to listen carefully to the Liturgy of the Word and not just to the Eucharist, because it's really the Word that is going to till up the soil of the heart and enable us to see Jesus in the breaking of bread, because he is invisible. It doesn't look like Jesus. It looks like bread and wine, but he's actually present in his glorified body, in his resurrected body, which isn't bound by space and time. It can do those kind of things.

What about the first reading from Acts of the Apostles? Once again on this third Sunday of Easter, the Church continues to bring us back to the book of Acts and look at the birth of the Church. Here it gives an account of Peter's (what I like to call) first homily. I teach at a seminary, so I teach a lot of men who are going to be ordained deacons and priests and so a big day for them is when they preach their first homily. So I always like to bring to their attention that this is Peter's first homily. Now the Church doesn't give us the whole homily unfortunately — I would've liked that. She just gives us a couple of excerpts from it and this is what it says in Acts 2:14:

But Peter, standing with the eleven [this is on the day of Pentecost], lifted up his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.

And then it skips down to verse 22

"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know — this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it. For David says concerning him, `I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will dwell in hope. For thou wilt not abandon

my soul to Hades, nor let thy Holy One see corruption. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou wilt make me full of gladness with thy presence.'

"Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this which you see and hear.

A beautiful little excerpt from the homily. Why did the Church pick this particular piece from Peter's otherwise long homily. Well if you look at what we just read, it's basically a summary of the Gospel. It's a summary of the good news. How did Peter preach? What was his first thing he wanted tell people about? We wanted to tell people about the life of Jesus, his miracles and his signs. He wanted to tell people about the passion and death of Jesus, about his descent into Hades, his descent into the realm of the dead, and then fourth about his resurrection and his ascension into heaven. In other words, he is telling them about the mystery of the incarnation and the Paschal mystery; the passion, death, resurrection and ascension. In other words, he's telling them the Gospel. Frequently I hear all the time people say "how should we evangelize? How should we communicate the faith to the next generation or communicate it to people who haven't heard it before?" And I always try to say, "imitate the Apostles." What did they do? Where did they start? They started with Jesus too. Just begin by telling the story of who he was, what he did, his wonders, his miracles, his passion, his death, his resurrection, his descent and his ascension into heaven. And all of this of course is summed up for us where? In the Apostles' Creed. So you'll see that Peter's homily

contains some of the main articles of faith that we profess in the Creed itself. This is the good news and this is what Peter is bringing to the people.

Although I would highlight here, notice the line that says “you won't abandon my soul to Hades, or let your holy one see corruption.” That's a quotation from Psalm 16. It's a Psalm of David, but it's being interpreted by Peter as having been fulfilled literally in Jesus. So David is talking about the fact that God will not abandon him. But of course David's tomb was with them in Jerusalem to this day, as Peter goes on to say, and David did experience corruption in the grave. But his words pointed to someone who would not experience corruption in the grave and who would not be left in Hades, the realm of the dead. Namely Jesus himself. So the Church has always believed that although Jesus died and although he was buried, his body remained incorrupt in the tomb, and his soul journeyed to Hades, to the realm of the dead, in order to liberate the righteous of the old covenant and bring them into the heavenly kingdom.

This is what we mean in the Creed when we say Jesus descended into hell. We don't mean that Jesus descended into the realm of the damned. That is what we tend to mean in English when we say the word hell — like with “go to hell,” we are telling someone to be damned (not a nice thing to say by the way). The Greek word for the English word hell is *Hades*. It is just the realm of the dead. So when Peter says that Jesus was not abandoned to *Hades* or when the Creed says that Jesus descended into *Hades* — that is the original Creed, it was in Greek — it means that Jesus goes to the realm of the dead. Not as one of the damned, but as Savior, as the deliverer; who through his resurrection and ascension, is going to lead on high a host of captives into the heavenly kingdom. We are going to look at that later when we get to the great mystery of the Ascension.

But this is the Gospel and so for this day, what a coincidence, what is the Responsorial Psalm. It is Psalm 16. It is the very Psalm that Peter quotes in his homily, with the refrain “Lord, you will show us the path of life and you won't give us up to Sheol.” *Sheol* is the Hebrew name for the realm of the dead that gets

translated into Greek as *Hades*. I don't mean to be too confusing here but this kind of basic knowledge of the names of the realm of the dead can be helpful. In the Old Testament the realm of the dead was called Sheol in Hebrew. In the New Testament it is called *Hades* in Greek. And then that comes over into old archaic English as hell as the word for the realm of the dead. And then in contemporary English, we tend to use hell exclusively for the realm of the damned. So it can be a little confusing when we encounter those words. But the Responsorial Psalm here is that God doesn't give us up to Sheol. He doesn't allow us to remain there, but he's going to show us the path of life and lead us to the resurrection of not just Christ, but to our own resurrection on the day of judgment at the the final judgment in the beginning of the new creation at the end of time. So that is the good news for today. That's the good news for the third Sunday of Easter as we continue to journey with the early Church, with the risen Christ in the Eucharist, toward the great feast of Pentecost that will bring Easter to its close.