The Third Sunday of Easter

(Year A)

First Reading	Acts 2:14, 22-33
Response	Thou dost show me the path of life
Psalm	Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11
Second Reading	1 Peter 1:17-21
Gospel Acclamation	Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?
Gospel	Luke 24:13-35

The third Sunday of Easter for Year A continues our journey through the brief letter of 1 Peter. And on this third Sunday in Year A, we look at 1 Peter 1:17-21, with a particular focus on the theme of the exile. With that in mind, let's read through the letter, and then we'll just kind of back up and unpack its meaning for this day. So 1 Peter 1:17 says this:

> ...if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake. Through him you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.[1]

Alright, so it's a short passage, but there's a lot going on here as is usually the case with 1 Peter...and a lot that's worthy of our attention. So if we just walk through it step by step, a few things stand out. Number one, notice that Peter is speaking to

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[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.

the congregation, and he just throws out (almost in passing) that the Father—God the Father—is one:

> ...who judges each one impartially according to his deeds...

Now the Greek word there for deeds, *ergon*, is translated elsewhere—like in the letters of Paul—usually translated with the word "work" or "works." So what Peter is actually talking about here is judgment according to works. And one reason that's an important theme is, as you know, if you look at the letters of Paul, Paul will often talk about justification by faith apart from works...or in many cases, apart from works of the law, like in Galatians 2 or Romans 3-4 or in Ephesians 2. And this, what Peter is talking about here, is not contradictory to that teaching of Paul, because Paul himself—although he will talk about initial justification according to faith, according to belief, according to trust in Christ—he too in Romans 2 will talk about the fact that at the final judgment, we will judged not only by our faith, but also according to our works — *erga* in Greek.

So this is just—in 1 Peter 1 here—this is just a standard affirmation of the apostolic teaching that final justification or final judgment is not by faith alone, but by faith and according to works. So that's just an important point here. He doesn't elaborate on it in this context; he just asserts it, which shows you, by the way, that it's kind of an accepted teaching. It's not something that's really a point of controversy. Judgment according to works is not a controversial teaching in the first century AD. It's going to become controversial 16 centuries later, but not in the first century AD. So that's the first point.

The second aspect of this passage from 1 Peter that's fascinating is the imagery of exile. And this is really, really fascinating. When Peter says to the congregation, to his audience:

> ...conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.

What exactly does that mean? Well, the Greek expression there is *paroikias*. It can be translated "exile" or "sojourn." It literally means...it comes from, I should say, two Greek words: *par* and *oikoos*;. The word *oikos* just means "house." So a

paroikos — par means "next to" or "with." Someone who is *paroikos* is literally someone dwelling beside the house—not inside the house, but beside the house, which would be the kind of thing that someone who was a sojourner or a traveler would do. They would not have their own home to dwell in, they would be *paroikias*, they would be without a home or in exile.

Now I've never noticed this before, but there's a really excellent commentary by Daniel Keating in the *Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* series. And on page 45 and 46 of this commentary, Daniel Keating says this about the word "sojourning" or "exile." It's really fascinating. He writes:

> "Sojourning" is literally "dwelling beside" (*paroikia*)... Why is this instructive? Our English word "parish" derives from *paroikia*. The local church—our parish—is meant to be the gathering of Christian "sojourners" and "aliens" who are far from their true home. And what is our *true* home? It is where God dwells...[2]

So notice what Keating is pointing out there. It's fascinating that the very language that we use today to describe congregations of various Catholics in various local situations—or what you might call local churches—the language of the parish (the church parish) or parochial schools (schools associated with a parish) comes from the Greek word *paroikia*, which literally means "in exile." So a parish is nothing other than a gathering of exiles. It's a gathering of people who realize and who live according to the truth that this visible world is not our true home...that we are actually in exile. We're still waiting for the coming of a new Heavens and a new Earth, for the coming of a New Creation and for the entry into a new Promised Land.

So the theme here of exile and return is really rooted in the ancient Jewish idea of the Exodus—that while the Israelites were in Egypt, they were in exile, they were away from their home. And then God delivered them through the blood of the Passover lambs and brought them on a journey to their homeland, to their Promised Land, to their true dwelling place.

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[2] Daniel Keating, *First and Second Peter, Jude* (Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), 45-46

So what Peter is saying here in this first chapter is he's trying to get the Christians to whom he's writing to understand that the visible and material world is not their final destiny. It's not their ultimate home, and that every single Christian—every single believer in Christ—is on a journey, is making an exodus...a journey to the ultimate Promised Land.

Now, if you have any doubts about that, you can just look at the third point here. Because as soon as Peter says that, he now shifts gears to the image of Christ and comparing Christ to a lamb without blemish or spot. So he says here:

> ...that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Now, when Peter uses here the language of "ransom", that means payment in order to deliver someone usually from slavery or from prison. So you would pay off the debt of a person who was in a debtor's prison, or if someone had become a slave, you could ransom them and buy their freedom. So that's the exact language that's used over and over again in the prophets to describe what God did to Israel at the time of the Exodus. He ransomed them from exile and brought them home to the Promised Land.

And what Peter's saying here is that in this case, God ransomed Israel not with money—He didn't use silver or gold—but He used something far more precious than silver and gold. He used the blood of the lamb — who was initially the Passover. But now He's using the blood of the true Passover lamb, which is Christ Himself—who, like the original Passover lamb, was unblemished. He was without sin. And this theme here of the ransom is a new Exodus theme. So what Peter is doing there is helping his audience to understand that the Exodus isn't just something that happened centuries and centuries ago at the time of Moses. It's something that was actually ultimately fulfilled on Calvary, when Christ, the Lamb of God, took away the sins of the world by pouring out His precious blood in order to ransom them from sin and from death. Beautiful.

So you can just see—just as a side note here—the reason in particular the Church would pick this passage during the Easter season is that the Latin word for Easter is *pascha*, which is not actually a Latin word. It's actually an Aramic word that means Passover. So during the Easter season, we're not just celebrating the resurrection of Christ. We're celebrating the new Passover, the new *pascha*—the Passover of Jesus from this world to the realm of the Father, from this valley of tears to the Promised Land of Heaven.

And again, if you have any doubts that that's what Peter is actually talking about, you can just look at his words in 1 Peter 1:3-4, where he says this:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you…

So you see that? "Kept in heaven." So if you're thinking about the Old Testament, what is the inheritance that's kept for me? Well, it's the earthly Promised Land of Canaan. But what Peter is saying here is he's taking that same theme, but he's transfiguring it. He's transforming it. He's supernaturalizing it, and he's elevating it and saying, "No, actually the true inheritance is not the earthly Promised Land but that which is kept in Heaven for you, the Promised Land of the new Heavens and the new Earth, the new creation, the resurrection of the body and eternal life.

Now, the fifth and final aspect of the passage that's worth highlighting is the last line, where Peter says:

> Through him you have confidence in God…

The Greek word there for confidence is *pistos*. It's very closely related to the root word *pistis*, which is the Greek word for faith or trust. So *pistos* literally means confidence or trust in God. Very close, very similar to the word faith. So when Peter says "you have *pistos* in God":

> ...you have confidence in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith…

Pistis, hear the similarity there?

> ...and hope are in God.

What he's basically telling the Christians to whom he's writing—and through them, telling us—is that ultimately, especially during this Easter season, our faith in God (our belief, our *pistis*) is rooted in the hope that comes from the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In other words, what happens to Jesus on Good Friday and then on Easter Sunday in the resurrection, will also happen to us. Just as Christ dies and suffers on Good Friday, so will we die and suffer. However, just as Christ on the third day is raised from the dead, so too shall we be raised from the dead to enter into the eternal inheritance of the heavenly Promised Land.

So for those who might be tempted to doubt their own share in the bodily resurrection, which if you look at the whole letter of 1 Peter, you'll see it's written to people who are obviously suffering and being persecuted or at least being judged negatively by their neighbors and by the people living around around them who aren't Christians. There can be the temptation to lose hope, and so what Peter is saying is that our hope is ultimately rooted—our confidence is rooted in the fact of the resurrection of Christ. And that is, really, of course, what the whole Easter season is about. It's what we're celebrating during this Easter season—the reality of Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead, which gives us the sign and the pledge of our own bodily resurrection that will happen at the end of time, at the final judgment. That's what our hope is.

So in closing, I'd just like to end with a brief quotation here from one of the most ancient commentaries on the first letter of Peter. It's from St. Bede the Venerable. Bede was a monk who lived in what today is known as England. He was from the realm of North Umbria—that was the name back then. But he was a British English monk living in the 8th century and wrote commentaries on many of the books of the Bible. And he was one of the first persons to write a commentary on

all seven Catholic epistles, including 1 Peter. And this is what he had to say about the passage we're reading in the Mass today for the third Sunday, and I quote:

> "Live out the time of your life here in fear," lest namely through sloth and carelessness you become unworthy of so great a father, and, while you may live out the time of your life here safely, you may not be able to reach the promised happiness of the fatherland.[3]

That's from the *Commentary on 1 Peter* 1:17. In other words, what Bede is saying here is that if what Peter is saying is true, and we're actually exiles and we're still on a journey, then we have to be vigilant. We have to live our lives in this world in preparation for the next world. We have to live our lives here careful that we don't lose our inheritance in the life of the world to come.

And I don't know about you, but as a Catholic, what strikes me so powerfully about that is that—at least from my point of view growing up as a cradle Catholic—if there's anything that's kind of ordinary and even seemingly this worldly, it's the idea of a Catholic parish. If you went to parochial school—if you went to a Catholic school—or if you went to a small parish like I grew up in, it just seems to be rather ordinary. And I would even venture to say that many Catholics don't think of their parish as a collection of people who are living in exile.

But that's actually what a parish is according to 1 Peter. It's a gathering of exiles, of people who are coming together because they all recognize that this visible world is not their final destination, it's not their home. And so the parish is the place in which we journey to our ultimate home, to our heavenly home, and we get a foretaste of the New Creation. And nowhere does that happen more powerfully and more supremely than in, of course, the celebration of the Eucharist and the Eucharistic liturgy. Because when we come to the Eucharist (when we come to the liturgy of the Eucharist) we actually leave this world behind and we taste—literally, but also sacramentally and spiritually—Heaven on Earth. We're caught up with all of the angels and the choirs of Heaven singing, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts."

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[3] Bede of Northumbria, *Commentary on 1 Peter* 1:17; trans. David Hurst

Because in the Mass, there is in a real sense, a coming together of Heaven and Earth. It's Heaven coming down to Earth, and Earth going up to Heaven so that we might partake—in a sacramental way, in a partial way, but in a real way—of the life of that eternal inheritance that is:

> ...imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven...

...for those of us who are here in exile now, but journeying toward the Promised Land that we're celebrating and to which Jesus went ahead of us after He rose from the dead on Easter.