

## Homily for Third Sunday of Easter

Our Scripture lessons for today have one common, encouraging theme: No matter what happens in our lives, the risen Jesus is always with us. God is near to those who seek Him and who want to live in His presence, doing His will. The Emmaus incident is the story of a God who will not abandon us when we are hurt and disappointed. As Francis Thompson put it, He is The Hound of Heaven Who relentlessly follows us when we try to escape from His love. The message of today's Scripture readings is that the followers of Jesus are to maintain contact with their risen Lord through prayer, the Eucharist, and the Bible. The readings also remind us that our belief in Jesus' presence in the consecrated Bread and Wine should help us to understand better his presence in the Bible and in the believing and worshipping community. Putting the two appearances (to the Emmaus disciples and to Peter), together, it is clear that the risen Jesus wants Peter to act as spokesman for him and that the faithful who seek to follow Jesus should seek his company in the Eucharist, in prayer, and in the Bible under the direction of Peter and his successors.

**The first reading (Acts 2:14, 22-33) explained:** Today we hear the beginning of Peter's first public proclamation about Jesus, telling the gathered people about and how God raised Jesus from death, thus fulfilling the Messianic prophecies about the promised descendant of David. The reading is taken from the first and the longest of Peter's five discourses preserved in the Acts of the Apostles. During his speech, Peter refers to Israel's beloved King David, quoting Psalm 16 (ascribed to David), and asserts that David, "foresaw and spoke of the Resurrection of the Christ." Today's reading tries to describe a time before the earliest Christians realized that God was calling them to embrace all people. At this stage, they acted as though they were only the first few Jews to have caught on to the Messianic identity of Jesus, and their goal was only to convince other Jews of what they had realized.

**The second reading (1 Peter 1:17-21) explained:** Peter exhorts the early Church, made up of Hebrew and pagan converts, to place their Faith and Hope in God Who has saved them through the precious Blood of His Son and Who has raised Jesus from the dead. Peter repeats the assertion made in Acts, that Jesus' death and Resurrection was part of God's plan from all eternity. Hence, Jesus' sufferings and subsequent glorification by God should serve to center the Christian's Faith and Hope in God Who has accepted those sufferings as an act of Redemption for all mankind. From this reassuring truth, Christians should sense God's providence, both in their own current situations and in the whole of their lives, and they should understand the place of their present struggles in a wider context. The root of our Faith must be the Resurrection of Jesus, and Peter argues that it is essential for everyone in the Christian community to experience the risen Jesus alive and present in everyday life.

in today's gospel the Emmaus incident described shows us a God who will not abandon us when we are hurt and disappointed. The message of today's Scripture readings is that the followers of Jesus are to maintain contact with their Risen Lord through prayer, the Eucharist, and the Bible. The readings also remind us that our belief in Jesus' presence in the consecrated Bread and Wine should help us to understand better his presence in the Bible and in the believing and worshipping community. Putting the two appearances (to the Emmaus disciples and to Peter), together, it is clear that the risen Jesus wanted Peter to act as spokesman for him, and that the faithful who seek to follow Jesus should seek his

company in prayer, the Eucharist, and the Bible under the direction of Peter and his successors.

**Life messages:** 1) **Jesus meets us on our Emmaus Road.** The risen Lord meets us on the road to our Emmaus, both in the ordinary experiences of our lives, and in the places to which we retreat when life is too much for us. We, too, have hopes and dreams about better health, healing, financial security and family relationships. These hopes and dreams often shatter. The story promises us, however, that Jesus will come to us in unfamiliar guises to support and strengthen us when we least expect our risen Lord. Emmaus moments come to us when we meet the risen Christ on our life's journey through rough times.

2) **The road to Emmaus is a road of companionship.** Jesus, now freed from the space-time limits of his earthly life, is present in our midst and wants to be our Friend. The risen Lord desires that we walk with Him and with one another: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior" (Isaiah 43:2-3). He wants to join us in our travels of life: "I am a Companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts" (Psalms 119:63). "Where two or three are gathered in My Name, I am there among them" (Matthew 18:20).

3) **We meet Jesus daily in our life's journey.** The Church instructs us to hear Jesus on a daily basis through our faithful reading of, and meditation on, the Bible; through our participation in the Eucharistic celebration at which we receive Jesus as our spiritual Food and Drink ; through our personal and family prayers; and through our family meals. When we meet our risen Lord through the Word of God, we commune with him. We renew our relationship with Jesus through prayer. All these meetings prepare and enable us to encounter the risen Jesus living in all the people we meet and to do Him humble, loving and selfless service in each of them.

4) Do our hearts burn when we listen to the Risen Lord in tradition teaches us that the reading of the Scriptures, the study of the Scriptures and the proclamation of the message of the Scriptures are the primary ways in which we meet God. Vatican II (Dei Verbum 21) tells us that Jesus is to be equally venerated in the Eucharist and in the Bible. Therefore, we need to study the Bible, learn the Bible, memorize the Bible and meditate on the word of God. We know that Christ lives in the Bible, and so we need to spend time in the Bible to have a deep, intimate, loving, caring, long-term relationship with Jesus Christ. We know we are to brush our teeth every day. Likewise, we are to read the Bible every day, making it habitual, because people either read the Bible daily or almost never. When we read the Scriptures daily we meet and converse with Jesus Christ! Abraham Lincoln, whom many consider the best President of the United States, said: "The greatest gift that God gave to human beings is the Bible." Another President of the United States, John Quincy Adams,

said that it was a principle of his to read the Bible through each and every year. Yet another great President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, said, "A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education." Goethe, the great German philosopher, said that the beauty of the Bible grows as we grow in our understanding of it.

**5) We need to find Jesus in the Breaking of the Bread.** In the Gospel story for today, we learn that we find Christ is in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist. When we approach the altar to receive the Sacrament, we see and receive Christ. In John 6, Jesus says, "Whoever eats My Body and drinks My Blood shall live with me eternally." The Eucharist is true "soul food," the Bread of life for eternity. It feeds us and fulfills our spiritual needs. It is a pity that often we don't realize what is happening during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, the sacred banquet of all believers. In this meal, we are in communion, not only with Jesus, but also with our family and friends who have preceded us in death. The Eucharist is not simply Bread and Wine for today – it is a banquet for all eternity.

**Joke of the day:** On her first train trip, a little girl was put into an upper berth by her mother. The mother then assured her that Jesus would watch over her during the night. As the lights were switched off the girl became alarmed and called out softly: "Mom, are you there?" "Yes dear," her mother replied. A little later the child called in a louder voice: "Daddy, are you also there?" "Yes", was the reply. After this had been repeated several times, one of the passengers lost patience and shouted: "We're all here. Your father, your mother, your brothers and sisters and cousins, your uncles and aunts – all are here. Now go to sleep!" There was silence for a while. Then, in a hushed voice the child asked: "Mom, was that risen Jesus traveling with us?"