

Homily: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter: 2017: Cycle A: Acts 2: 14, 22-28, 1Pet 1: 17-21; Lk 24: 13-35

*“Encountering the Lord Jesus like the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus”*

Today we hear the powerful account of the two disciples speaking to the Lord Jesus on the road to Emmaus. There are many spiritual lessons for us to learn from this account, but **the most important** is that the Lord Jesus is calling us to an ever deeper personal relationship with Him. Let us look at what is going on in this journey to Emmaus.

1. *“Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.”* The two disciples did not recognize Jesus in their midst. Why? It may very well be that they were blind to His presence because of the suffering, pain and grief that they were still experiencing from the very death of Jesus on the Cross. **Suffering, pain and grief are make - or - break spiritual realities: they either draw us closer to God or farther away from Him!** It’s a real challenge, but if we let God work, He wants to use the mystery of the Cross (*i.e., various sorts of suffering, pain and grief*) to bring us to the glory the Resurrection (*i.e., new life in Him*). **The reality is: nothing in life can draw us closer to God or farther away from Him than suffering, pain and grief.** It all depends on whether we respond to the grace of drawing close to Him in the midst of our trials and tribulations, despite our at times confusion, discouragement, and weariness in the midst of it. If we are honest, we know that the happy times of life don’t usually mature our character and help us to grow spiritually nearly as much as the sufferings do. Fortunately if we embrace the sufferings in union with Christ, even now we will experience an inner joy and peace that the world cannot understand (*this is the secret of the saints*) and it will one day lead to ultimate joy in God’s heavenly Kingdom.
2. *“And it happened that, while He was with them at table, He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized Him, but He vanished from their sight.”* The two disciples finally recognized Jesus was with them in the “breaking of the bread”, i.e., in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which is the

renewal of Jesus's one eternal Sacrifice on the Cross, in an unbloody manner. **The Mass is the source and summit of our Catholic Faith** – it is where we encounter the Lord Jesus most directly here on earth, and are given strength for the journey. Also it is where we can put things in proper perspective, especially our sufferings. **Do we realize that? Have we taken the Mass for granted?** If we realize what is really going on at Mass, we will never be bored at Mass! We will encounter the Lord: *in the opening of the Scriptures, in the Consecration, and in Communion and all the prayers of the Mass.* This is also why the Church requires us to go to Mass on all Sundays and Holy Days under the pain of mortal sin - we are only excused if we are sick or it is truly impossible to get to Mass. The Church as a good spiritual mother is looking out for her children, namely us, knowing that it is in the Mass that we encounter the Lord Jesus in a most **personal** way - if we open our hearts to the grace! Truly if we recognize Jesus in the “breaking of the bread” i.e. at Mass, the rest of the Catholic faith falls into place. From my experience as a priest, people who appreciate the reality of the Mass also tend to appreciate the rest of the Catholic Faith. People who don't see the Mass for what it really is, usually also ignore many other components of the Catholic Faith. **The Mass is the foundation for everything else we do as Catholics!** When we enter into it reverently, it gives us the vision of God ever more deeply over time.

3. ***“Were not our hearts burning within us while He spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures for us?”*** The disciples only became aware that their hearts were burning within them and that the meaning of the Scriptures was opened up to them **after** they encountered Jesus in “the breaking of the bread”, in the celebration of the Mass in Jesus's company. **The Eucharist is not just a symbol of the Last Supper – it is really the Lord Jesus – Real and Personal!** Let us resolve today to humbly ask the Lord: *to help us to recognize Him in a deeper way at Mass (try to even come to daily Mass when you can – it is such a grace!), in the “breaking of the bread”, so our hearts may burn within us, in love, for the Lord, and give us the grace we need to embrace our crosses, help others with theirs, and to share the gift of the Catholic faith with others.* God bless you.