

## THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Acts 2:14, 22-33 | 1 Peter 1:17-21 | Luke 24:13-35  
(These verses follow the homily.)

*May your people exalt forever, oh God, in renewed youthfulness of Spirit so that, rejoicing now in the restored glory of our adoption, we may look forward in confident hope, the rejoicing of the day of resurrection. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever, amen.*

**W**E continue our reflections on the great mystery of Christ's death and resurrection. We're working our way liturgically to the great feast of Pentecost, which is a celebration of the Spirit entering into the disciples, intoxicating them with an awareness of something they truly felt, truly experienced. They became ecstatic, and those who watched them, those who saw them, they said, "Well, they've obviously been drinking way too much in the morning." But I long for that kind of experience for you, for me, for all of us — those experiences that are absolutely undeniable, that show we are in touch with something so much greater than just the world we live in, so much more than the material world. It strikes me that when we look at this great feast of Easter, we see, in a way, the culmination of the work of Jesus, but

more than the culmination, it seems to be the essence of what he was here to teach us. What did we learn from his death and resurrection?

I find it fascinating that whenever you start reading Scripture passages or listening to commentaries on Scripture, you hear things like, "Well, that part of Mark isn't really part of the original Mark, and maybe that really wasn't what he wrote." And then you see conflicts in the different stories, and you listen to some objective voice on a piece of paper or on the screen of your computer, questioning things and wondering about things. It's as if, well, if you go just to the facts of these events and you try to say, "Okay, do I feel anything? Do I feel something from these stories?" Usually not. They're factual. They're interesting, and you can easily write them off, and many people

do, saying, "Well, it's a myth, and it's a story. It never really happened, or if it happened, it happened a long time ago, and it has nothing to do with me." But the truth is, this is a story of your relationship with God, my relationship with God, and it's a story, if you listen and believe, as I do, and as the Church does and as most believers do, those who understand and have experiences of who God is — that the story is a model for us of a story we are supposed to be going through. What happened to Jesus is supposed to happen to us. It has to be a real experience, something that is so profound that we know we're in touch with something so much beyond logic, beyond the understanding of facts, beyond being told what we need to do or how we need to do it. No, it's something that happens to us, something undeniable, something transformative.

So I want to see if I can, using the story of the road to Emmaus and the other stories, if I can draw something out of this that will put you in a disposition of being radically open to that kind of experience, because that to me is what preaching is for. It's not to explain something or tell you solely what happened in the past, but to somehow awaken in your imagination that this story is your story, something you're to experience as those people experienced it. And when you experience it, there's a shift. There's a change. There's an increase in awareness, a new sense of things that take you beyond the literal, beyond the

practical, and into a world we call the world of spirit.

Now, the story of Jesus is a very human story. I know that I've said this to you, but only recently in my ministry have I been able to focus as completely as I am now on the humanity of Jesus. I know he was God. I know he was man. I know he was both, but for some reason, in my upbringing, Jesus was always God and did everything he did because he was God, and I couldn't identify with what he did so much, because I'm not God. But when I think about him as a human just like me, with the same faults, the same weaknesses — I'm not saying that I'm sinless, and I'm certainly not saying that he's a sinner, but the things we call sins need to be re-evaluated. So much of what I hear in confession, when people confess their sins, they're confessing their humanity: "I lose my temper. I get upset. I have given in to this temptation, to that temptation." Yes, you could call those sins, venial sins, but those are the sins that are part of just what we live with being a human. The Church only requires confession for mortal sins, sins of such great serious nature that they completely destroy our relationship with God, and we need to go back to the Church to have the Church pray with us to be reunited with God. So it's all been a misunderstanding that confession is required for every frailty, every whoops, every mistake. That's what I grew up with, but that's not the tradition. God is forgiveness, and when it comes to our humanity, which he created, he is very patient and

understanding. And it seems to me we are not supposed to be focusing on our weaknesses and our sins, but on our potential as spiritual beings, that we can somehow experience what Jesus experienced. So we look at his life, a human life, and you say 90 percent of Jesus' life is private. We don't know much about the 30 years that he lived, and I would say those were years of ordinary, human activity, and I'd say most of our lives are made up of about 90 percent of that kind of thing. Go to the grocery store, do the laundry, take care of this, take care of that, pay taxes, but then there's another part. Maybe it's that ten percent, but that's the part that is potentially capable of entering into a depth of understanding, a wisdom that's beyond our human nature's capacity to come up, with and open ourselves to something that radically changes the core of who we are and how we relate to everything in the world.

So if you look at the life of Jesus after a life, in a way, of preparation to do what he was called to do, to be a minister to his Father, whom he loved, and we're talking about God, his Father. He wanted to teach and preach. *He had a conviction that there was a truth that people didn't see, and he wanted desperately to help them see the truth. The truth — that was his whole mission.* He lived for the truth, and what he wanted more than anything else was to be successful in creating, in the souls, in the hearts of a certain group of men, an understanding of what he knew and what he saw. And he tried to teach it, and he did work for three years.

I can't imagine having a teacher as powerful as the Son of God working with me and doing signs and wonders, all this incredible stuff, and all they could really focus on, it seems, in the long haul, is that they kept — they were very excited about the political side of Jesus' message, that he was going to redeem Israel and bring it back to wholeness and greatness, and they were caught up in that. They thought, "This is going to be great, and I'll be in a position of power and authority." There was really no distinction between politics and religion back then. It was the same thing. It was the same people running it all, and they got caught up in that, and they just couldn't grasp what Jesus was saying. Couldn't grasp it, and three years is not that long. And I'm sure Jesus, as a human being, thought he would have a lot longer time, and then comes this strange twist at the end that's been foreshadowed. The more people realize how much it was described in the Old Testament that Jesus would go through exactly what he went through, the more you see it, the more you realize that there's something about what happened to Jesus that is so core and so crucial for us to understand. And we need to go through it if we're going to find the truth.

What did he go through? Well, at the risk of oversimplification, he went through a process when he had to accept, or allow, an ending that he wouldn't have wanted as a human being. He had to be seen as someone who failed. He had to recognize that the work he thought he had done for these

men, when push came to shove and they were really had to show they were committed to him, most of them, all, proved they really weren't committed to him or at least didn't understand when it came to something that looked like it was beyond their understanding. Could they stand up and support him even though they didn't quite understand what he was saying, but say he is the truth? They couldn't, and so Jesus had to face that as a man. It was difficult, and those stories in the Garden of Gethsemane, where three times he denied them. I keep going back to that, because I never remember there were three times. Just somehow, when I was growing up, it was one little, casual comment. "God, I really don't want to do this, but if you want me to, I'll be glad to." That's what it sounded like. No, he was just begging, begging, begging not to do this, but he allowed it.

He allowed it. That's what the word suffering means. Suffering is such an interesting word. When Jesus said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me," it means allow. It also means to endure, put up with. *That's what suffering is, and that means it often includes pain. But there's another way to imagine it when it's not about pain, but it's simply about accepting reality as it is and going with it and trusting it and knowing somehow, if I go with this, it will bring me to a better place, to a fuller place.* And the thing that I fear is being robbed of me by this destiny that has been planned for me, that is going to keep me from doing my work, and then the truth is just the opposite. It's giving in to the

way it's written, that you're able to be successful in whatever it is that you're called to do, and that's what's so amazing about the resurrection, because Jesus had to accept the fact that he was at the end of his life, and it wasn't finished. And then he comes back in a resurrected form, and I don't know if I've really thought about it that much, but it's almost like, when he gave in to being destroyed by those enemies who kept him from doing the work, he came back in a way so pure, so alive, so mysterious that he convinced everybody instantly. The very thing he gave into enabled him to accomplish everything he wanted to accomplish before he gave in to it. Isn't that interesting?

What is it that I don't allow or you don't allow to happen is there to enable you to have the satisfaction and the joy of accomplishing what core you need, you have inside you to accomplish? That's the mystery, and how do you do that? How do you know it works? Well, it's like everything else. It comes in stages, little events. One thing, when you start not pushing things to go faster than they are and not trying to resist them for what they are, when you start giving in to reality, you begin to feel a little bit more quiet, a little more peaceful, and there's a sign. Is it better to allow things to go in the pace they are rather than to force them to be something they're not? Is there something about allowing the normal process of growth and change to take place without pushing it and demanding that you be somewhere

further along in the journey than you are, or you're afraid that you're too far ahead, and you're losing your bearings? What about surrendering? What about allowing? What about giving in? And then what about giving in to an experience where you really are in touch with something that is beyond human? It's called a miracle, a mystical

experience, a moment of deep faith that comes sometimes. When you're kneeling somewhere, sometimes when you're driving, some insight comes. Those are the post-resurrection experiences of Jesus coming to you, to me, enlightening us and teaching us how to find the truth.

*Father, your intention, your longing is to enter into each of our hearts and awaken us to all that we are and all that you've planned for us. We're often preoccupied with so many concerns, and I ask you, beg you to open our eyes to see beyond the literal, beyond the demands of everyday life and open ourselves to the mystery of your presence within us, your ability to touch the core of who we are and enable us to be instruments of grace to one another. And we ask this in Jesus' name, amen.*

Just a reminder: if any of you are thinking about the fall retreats that I'm doing this year in Tuscany, I'd ask you to check them out on the website, [pastoralreflectionsinstitute.com](http://pastoralreflectionsinstitute.com). They're filling up. The spring one is just about full. There are still some openings in the November trip. So I'd love to have you join me for one of those experiences, immersed in the beauty of Tuscany, in the spirit of St. Francis in a place that I know is filled with Spirit and life. So thank you for considering it, and may God bless you.

### **Acts 2:14, 22-33**

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven,  
raised his voice, and proclaimed:

"You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem.

Let this be known to you, and listen to my words.

You who are Israelites, hear these words.

Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God

with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs,

which God worked through him in your midst, as you yourselves know.

This man, delivered up by the set plan and foreknowledge of God,

you killed, using lawless men to crucify him.

But God raised him up, releasing him from the throes of death,  
because it was impossible for him to be held by it.

For David says of him:

*I saw the Lord ever before me,  
with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.  
Therefore my heart has been glad and my tongue has exulted;  
my flesh, too, will dwell in hope,  
because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld,  
nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption.  
You have made known to me the paths of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence.*

"My brothers, one can confidently say to you  
about the patriarch David that he died and was buried,  
and his tomb is in our midst to this day.  
But since he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn 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 neither was he abandoned to the netherworld  
nor did his flesh see corruption.  
God raised this Jesus;  
of this we are all witnesses.  
Exalted at the right hand of God,  
he received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father  
and poured him forth, as you see and hear."

### **1 Peter 1:17-21**

Beloved:

If you invoke as Father him who judges impartially  
according to each one's works,  
conduct yourselves with reverence during the time of your sojourning,  
realizing that you were ransomed from your futile conduct,  
handed on by your ancestors,  
not with perishable things like silver or gold  
but with the precious blood of Christ  
as of a spotless unblemished lamb.

He was known before the foundation of the world  
but revealed in the final time for you,  
who through him believe in God

who raised him from the dead and gave him glory,  
so that your faith and hope are in God.

**Luke 24:13-35**

That very day, the first day of the week,  
two of Jesus' disciples were going  
to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus,  
and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred.  
And it happened that while they were conversing and debating,  
Jesus himself drew near and walked with them,  
but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.  
He asked them,  
"What are you discussing as you walk along?"  
They stopped, looking downcast.  
One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply,  
"Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem  
who does not know of the things  
that have taken place there in these days?"  
And he replied to them, "What sort of things?"  
They said to him,  
"The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene,  
who was a prophet mighty in deed and word  
before God and all the people,  
how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over  
to a sentence of death and crucified him.  
But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel;  
and besides all this,  
it is now the third day since this took place.  
Some women from our group, however, have astounded us:  
they were at the tomb early in the morning  
and did not find his body;  
they came back and reported  
that they had indeed seen a vision of angels  
who announced that he was alive.  
Then some of those with us went to the tomb  
and found things just as the women had described,  
but him they did not see."  
And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are!  
How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!  
Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things

and enter into his glory?"  
Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets,  
he interpreted to them what referred to him  
in all the Scriptures.  
As they approached the village to which they were going,  
he gave the impression that he was going on farther.  
But they urged him, "Stay with us,  
for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over."  
So he went in to stay with them.  
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.  
Then they said to each other,  
"Were not our hearts burning within us  
while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?"  
So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem  
where they found gathered together  
the eleven and those with them who were saying,  
"The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!"  
Then the two recounted  
what had taken place on the way  
and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread.