

April 26, 2020
3rd Sunday of Easter
Luke 24:13-35

Now that very day two of them 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 Messiah 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 the bread.

Background:

Perhaps this gospel text is familiar. It is one of the favorite Easter gospels of the Church. It was one of the possible texts for Easter Sunday, it was the gospel for the Wednesday after Easter, and it is used again for the Third Sunday of Easter each year.

Execution by crucifixion was reserved for the most contemptuous of criminals. The early disciples were disappointed and humiliated by the fact that Jesus was crucified. Last Sunday's gospel also indicates that they were afraid for their own safety. It should be no surprise that some of the disciples gathered behind locked doors, and others simply fled the situation. Emmaus was a Roman spa, a place where there would be physical comfort.

The two that were on the road to Emmaus were likely pilgrims who had come to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, and they were likely on their way home. In the gospel text, they are disappointed to learn that Jesus seems to be continuing on after they reach Emmaus, but they extend to him a gesture of hospitality.

They are at some level disciples of Jesus. While they know of the events of Jesus' Crucifixion and even the report that the grave has been found empty, they seem ignorant of the risen Jesus' actual appearances. However, unlike the disciples who have hidden away behind a locked door out of fear, they speak openly about what has happened and of their own hopes that Jesus might be the one who would redeem Israel.

Despite the fact that they are disciples, they do not recognize Jesus, physically or theologically. Jesus brings to them a new understanding of their tradition that enables them to see how his rejection, crucifixion, and death were in accord with their scriptures. Even with that insight, they still do not recognize Jesus. It is not until the breaking of the bread that they recognize Jesus and the risen Lord. This breaking of bread is deliberately described in a way that parallels the description of the Last Supper. But as soon as they recognize him, Jesus disappears from their sight. They return immediately to Jerusalem to report their experience to the disciples, and they hear of the other experiences of the risen Lord.

Reflection Questions:

1. Where do you go when you are stressed or disappointed? Are you more likely to be talkative or shut down internally in those situations?
2. Have there been periods in your life when you were disappointed, frustrated, or even overwhelmed with a sense that God was not present or non-responsive to you?
3. How has the pandemic, social isolation, and the way you have attended Holy Week services affected your awareness of God's presence?
4. Luke says that Jesus drew near and walked with the two disciples, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. What is that saying to you about the two disciples, about God, and about us?
5. Luke reports that when the two disciples recognized him, he disappeared. How do you understand what Luke is telling those who will read his gospel?
6. Can you take some time now to talk with God honestly about whatever thoughts or feelings arose within you from this text? Or maybe you would like to talk with God about how the pandemic has disturbed your understanding of how God would be present in your world or in your life?

The gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for April 26, 2020, the Third Sunday of Easter

Then Peter proclaimed: "All of you in Jerusalem, hear these words. Jesus the Nazarene was commended to you by God with mighty deeds, which God worked through him in your midst, as you know.

This man you killed, using lawless men to crucify him. But God raised him up, releasing him from 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, David died, and his tomb is in our midst. But since he knew that God 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. Exalted at the right hand of God, he received the promise of the Holy Spirit from the Father and poured him forth."

Lord, you will show us the path of life. Keep me, O God, for in you I take refuge; you are my allotted portion and my cup. I bless the Lord who counsels me; even in the night my heart exhorts me. I set the Lord ever before me; with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices, my body, too, abides in confidence; you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption. You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your hand forever.

Beloved: If you invoke as Father him who judges 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.

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, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Two of Jesus' disciples were going to Emmaus, and they were conversing about all that had occurred. Jesus drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing?" Cleopas said to him, "Are you the only one who does not know what happened to Jesus, who was a prophet, how our chief priests and rulers crucified him. We were hoping he would redeem Israel. Some women have seen angels who announced he was alive." He said to them, "How slow you are to believe all that the prophets spoke!" Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures. They urged him to stay with them. And while he was with them, he said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he opened the Scriptures to us?" They returned to Jerusalem where they found 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 and how he was made known to them in the breaking of bread.

Excerpts from Acts 2:14, 22-33; Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-11; 1 Peter 1:17-21; and Luke 24:13-35