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On these Sundays of Easter, our Easter celebration continues as we reflect on the presence of the risen Christ among us. The Easter season invites us to enter more deeply into the meaning of the Paschal Mystery which we celebrate at every Eucharist. Each Eucharist is called a “little Easter” as it directs our attention to the Paschal Mystery which we celebrate. Christ’s paschal mystery — his life, passion, death and resurrection — are at the heart of our faith, continually offering faith and hope in God who is always faithful and responsive to the needs of all. Today’s readings capture the essence of the Easter season which we celebrate for 50 days. The refrain from today’s responsorial, Psalm 16 calls upon the risen Lord to show us the path of life. The readings provide us with guideposts along the way of life which the risen Christ has forged for us.

Psalm 16 is a clear affirmation of trust in God, who upholds us in our difficulties and who sustains our life, even in the very midst of death. The psalmist revels in God’s presence with abounding joy and blesses the Lord with praise and thanksgiving for having been rescued from death and for having been shown the path to new life in God. This same God of life raised Jesus from the dead. If we follow the path of life that Jesus models for us, we too shall rise from the dead with him and live eternally with God. This is our Easter faith and proclamation.

The first reading from Acts recounts Peter's speech delivered after the Spirit of Jesus had been poured out on the disciples. Peter narrates how Jesus was commended to us by God, to show us the path of life, a path that eventually brought death at the hands of those alien to God. Yet, God raised up Jesus from the throes of death and exalted him, making him our path to eternal life. The path that Jesus forged continues to be available to those who open themselves up to the abundance of the Spirit.

The second reading from 1 Peter asks us to conduct ourselves with reverence as we sojourn to God. Jesus has ransomed us for God not with any perishable goods but by the unblemished offering of his very life. Because Jesus was willing to give so totally of himself, God raised him and made him the eternal source of our faith and hope in God. We are called to model our lives on Jesus' life style of love and concern for others.

The Gospel reading from Luke takes us on the road to Emmaus, the path on which we face both the struggles and doubts of life, along with the insights and connections that Jesus offers. Two of Jesus' disciples, mostly likely a husband and wife, are returning to their home in Emmaus. Discouraged and distraught about all that happened to Jesus in Jerusalem, their messianic hopes were shattered when he suffered and died a cruel death.

When the risen Lord encounters the disciples on the way, their doubts and disappointments prevent them from recognizing him. In response to their concerns, Jesus unpacks the Jewish Scriptures showing them why the Messiah would suffer and die. Giving of self for others — even to the point of death — becomes the path to glory for Jesus as well as for any who choose to follow him.

The Emmaus search for wisdom continues as they invite the yet unrecognized Jesus into their home. As they share a meal, he takes bread, blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to them. In that very moment, they recognize Jesus but he quickly vanishes. In reflecting upon their experience on the road and at table, they realize two things. Their hearts were burning within as he unpacked the Scriptures for them. They recognized him in the breaking of the bread. Knowing such wisdom and connection had to be shared, they immediately return to the other disciples to tell their amazing story.

The Emmaus narrative is a very clear reminder of the Christian reality that we are nourished by the Lord from two tables: the table of the word and the table of the Eucharist. Both actions lead us to Jesus' path of life.

In preparation for celebrating this Sunday Eucharist, reflect on how you have come to know and deepen your awareness of the risen Christ through your reading and study of the Scriptures. Recount the times when you experienced your heart burning within you as the Lord "opened up" the Scriptures for you. Reflect also on how you have been fed by the Lord at the Eucharistic table. In so doing, recall ways in which you can be a source of nourishment to others, especially those in need both materially and spiritually. Let us use this Easter season to enter more fully into Jesus' path of life. Happy journeying to us all!

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

During the Easter Season, the first reading is taken from the Acts of the Apostles and not from the Hebrew Scriptures. Acts is seen as appropriate for the Easter season since it recounts how Jesus' followers conducted themselves after being gifted by the Spirit at Pentecost. Luke, the author of Acts, focuses on how the community began to organize itself, carrying out Jesus' mission and ministry by proclaiming to all the good news of the new age and salvation brought by Christ. Today's reading has Peter, on the very day of Pentecost, speaking to all the Jews present in Jerusalem for the pilgrimage Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) about the marvelous events they had just experienced. After asserting that with the descent of the Spirit the long-awaited messianic age has finally arrived, Peter witnesses to Jesus the Nazorean as the one sent by God to inaugurate the messianic age and through whom God worked mighty deeds. Yet, some lawless Jews refused to accept and believe, and thus plotted to have him killed. But God's plan was not to be undone. God raised up Jesus, thus releasing him from death's grip.

In this passage Peter uses a standard rabbinic method of argumentation from the Hebrew Scriptures asserting that David, the one to whom the Psalter's authorship is traditionally attributed, predicted the resurrection of Jesus. Quoting Psalm 16:8-11, today's psalm, Peter argues that since David died, his assertion of being rescued from death did not refer to himself. Therefore, David's prophesy referred to one of his descendants who would be rescued from death. Peter boldly proclaims that descendant to be Jesus, whom God raised up and to which they were all witnesses.

Now exalted at God's right hand, the place of glory and honor, Jesus received the promise of the Spirit and poured it out upon his followers. What they saw, heard and experienced was the presence of God's Spirit let loose on the earth to empower Jesus followers to proclaim boldly the new messianic age which Jesus inaugurated. The Spirit now guides them in the path of life.

### **PSALM 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11**

Psalm 16 is quoted by Luke in the first reading from Acts to show that David predicted the resurrection of Jesus, his descendant from the line of David. However, the original setting of the psalm speaks of the psalmist's confidence and trust in God for having been rescued from some imminent danger or calamity which could have led to death. The psalmist is confident that this saving act is all God's doing. The only appropriate response is joy along with praise of God who is always attuned to the cries of the *hasidim*, those faithful to covenant promises. In being rescued from death-dealing events, the psalmist is also confident that God will continue to guide the faithful ones on the path of life, a journey ultimately leading to joy in God's presence and esteemed and honorable delights at God's right hand.

Belief in the afterlife developed gradually in Judaism. Even up to Jesus' time, there were obvious disagreements concerning belief in the afterlife, with Pharisees affirming it while Sadducees denied it. Jesus' followers experienced the resurrected Jesus as alive in their midst, thus affirming belief in the afterlife and continued existence in God's presence. It would have been natural for them to search the Scriptures for passages that would align themselves with that belief. Psalm 16 was a natural choice, even though it might not have been the belief of the psalmist or community who composed it. Luke's community interpreted the psalm as a fitting explanation of the events that led to their experience of the risen Christ. During this Easter season, we too proclaim and sing this psalm as an affirmation of the Paschal Mystery, of what God did for Jesus and will do for all who walk Jesus' path of life.

### **1 PETER 1:17-21**

If you, as a disciple of the Lord, knew that Jesus would return tomorrow to judge you, how would you spend the rest of today? How would you get ready to encounter the Lord? The author of 1 Peter envisions such a context for us. If we claim to call upon God as Father, as one who judges according to our actions, then would we not

conduct ourselves in a manner that God would find pleasing and acceptable? The author understands our time on earth as a journey that will end in the fullness of God's presence, where we will be asked to justify our actions and their purpose. Since we were redeemed through the shedding of Christ's innocent blood, we who have committed ourselves to Christ need to live up to the responsibilities of that call. This is the essence of our baptismal call which we received or renewed at the Easter Vigil.

God becoming human in the person of Jesus was known and anticipated from the beginning of time. It was always part of God's plan to become human so as to be intimately connected with all of creation. In so doing, the Creator would be able to show us how to live as full human beings, a desire intended for us from the beginning. In coming as one of us, God's love was fully revealed in a concrete manner, even to the point of being willing to die in order to manifest the depth of that great love. In raising Jesus from death, God confirmed that Jesus' values and lifestyle are the path to life. In this we find our faith and our hope. We believe in God whose boundless love is always life-giving and never death-dealing.

Whenever we find ourselves floundering on our sojourn to God, we are to seek out the path of life which Jesus provides. Whenever we lose faith and hope, we are to remember that Jesus, even in his darkest hours, always trusted that God would ultimately reveal the path to life to him. Whenever we are called to encounter the Lord, both daily and at the end of our lives, we can be assured that Jesus, who has walked that path to life before us, will be there to greet us with open arms.

### **LUKE 24:13-35**

The journey to Emmaus by two disciples on the day of Christ's resurrection is one of the most well-known and memorable stories of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. Unique to Luke, this narrative was composed somewhere between 85-90 C.E., for a community that had not seen or met Jesus but who desired to know where and how they could encounter the risen Christ in their lives. Luke's community constructs this narrative to answer these significant questions that are still pertinent in our day.

Two disciples, most likely a husband and wife, were leaving Jerusalem for Emmaus, discussing all that had occurred there. Though Jesus drew near and walked with them, they did not recognize him. Instead, they seemed to be so preoccupied with

their own misunderstanding of what Jesus was about, that they failed to notice that it was truly Jesus traveling beside them.

As Jesus inquires about their discussion, they unveil their disappointment concerning Jesus of Nazareth whom they believed and hoped to be the messiah, the one to “redeem Israel.” Unfortunately, he was crucified, thus shattering all their hopes. Jesus responds by unpacking all the Scriptures concerning the suffering that the Christ had to undergo and thus enter into glory.

Arriving at Emmaus, most likely their home, Jesus accepts the invitation to stay with them for it is late. After a meal is prepared and served, Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them. Through this act they finally recognize him. To their amazement, Jesus immediately vanishes. As they begin to realize the significance of the day’s events they recall how “our hearts were burning within us while he spoke ... and opened the Scriptures to us.” Compelled to share this experience, they return to Jerusalem only to learn that the Lord had appeared to Simon. Astounded by the encounter, they announce to the disciples how they had come to recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

Through the Emmaus narrative Luke’s community proclaims that the risen Christ can only be recognized whenever one seeks nourishment from the Scriptures and the Eucharist. Without such nourishment and our willingness to share it with others, no matter the cost, we will never recognize the risen Lord who constantly draws near and always walks with us. The risen Christ and his path of life is found whenever we feed on God’s revealed word and break bread together. As often as we do this in memory of Jesus, we delve deeper into the Paschal Mystery and affirm it as our God-given path to life.

## **Planning: Third Sunday of Easter**

**By:** Lawrence Mick

Today’s Gospel of the encounter on the way to Emmaus offers a prime opportunity for some mystagogical preaching on the Eucharist. This rich passage illuminates a number of aspects of the Eucharist that might be the basis of preaching and reflection.

One area, is the link between the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The story makes it obvious that Christ is present in both. Does your assembly recognize Christ's presence in the word as clearly as in the Eucharist? If not, that might determine your focus this week.

On the other hand, if they are used to good preaching, some people may actually respond more powerfully to Christ's presence in the word than they do to the second half of the Mass. Is there need for some catechesis on the nature and importance of the eucharistic prayer? Does your faith community understand the purpose of the Lord's Prayer, sign of peace, and Lamb of God as part of the preparation for receiving Communion? Does the assembly understand the meaning of Communion and its communal nature? Do they maintain a common posture and sing the Communion song until all have received? Do most people receive both the body and the blood of Christ? Is there need for reflection on the fullness of these symbols and the reasons that Vatican II restored Communion under both species?

Does the assembly recognize the intimate link between the celebration of the Eucharist and the mission to which they are sent each week? You might print the insights of Pope John Paul II in today's bulletin: "We cannot delude ourselves: by our mutual love and, in particular, by our concern for those in need we will be recognized as true followers of Christ. (cf. Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46) This will be the criterion by which the authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations is judged" (*Mane Nobiscum Domine* #28).

Part of the purpose of mystagogy for the newly baptized is to help them integrate their new faith into daily living. That's also a challenge for all the baptized — no matter how long ago they celebrated that sacrament.

Besides the homily, how might you catechize the assembly regarding the Eucharist? Consider these offerings: Include in the bulletin a full page insert featuring various topics every week during the season. Provide evening reflections with a meal, presentation and discussion.

Along with Easter hymns, what Communion hymns might help people reflect more deeply on the meaning of the Eucharist? What petitions might draw upon the Eucharist itself, praying that we might live more fully what we celebrate on Sunday?

## **Prayers: Third Sunday of Easter**

**By:** Joan DeMerchant

## **Introduction**

The challenging questions continue. How do we encounter this risen Christ? Where do we find him? Our search is no different from our early Christian brothers and sisters. When they broke bread together in the Eucharist, they realized that he was there. By participating in this holy meal as members of a believing community, we experience that same presence among us. We learn about the power of being with one another in the simplest gestures of life. What could be more universal than breaking bread together — whether at an altar or an ordinary table?

## **Penitential Act**

- Lord Jesus, you joined your disciples on the road to Emmaus: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you listened to them and heard their concerns: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you revealed yourself in the breaking of the bread: Lord, have mercy.

## **Prayer of the Faithful**

**Presider** Let us pray for the world that needs the presence of the risen Christ.

**Minister** For the church: May we recognize Christ's presence in every eucharistic celebration ... we pray,

- For Christians who are deprived of celebrating the Eucharist — especially where there is war, poverty or the lack of pastoral leaders ... we pray,
- For those who are responsible for communicating the importance of the Eucharist: for parents, guardians, godparents and catechists ... we pray,
- For individuals and organizations that provide bread for the hungry or that advocate for the most vulnerable among us ... we pray,
- For children who are preparing to celebrate their first Communion, and for new recipients of the Eucharist ... we pray,
- For those who cannot be present in this celebration because of illness, work, lack of transportation or any kind of disability ... we pray,

**Presider** God of abundance: We are grateful for this eucharistic feast in which Jesus is made known to us. Make us worthy participants in every celebration of the breaking of the bread. Open our hearts to Christ's ongoing presence among us. We pray in the name of him who is with us always on the road of life. Amen.



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