

**St. Ann's Church – Washington, DC**  
**Third Sunday of Easter 2020 – April 26, 2020**  
**Homily by Msgr. Watkins, Pastor**

My dear Parishioners and Friends of St. Ann's Church,

I greet all of you who join us by way of social media today for our celebration of the Easter Season on this, the Third Sunday of Easter. By now, so many of us are wondering when this difficult ordeal of the contagion of the coronavirus will be over. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus in St. Luke's Gospel today, our eyes from time to time may be downcast in fear, anxiety, confusion, or even despair. These feelings may be yours right now, AND they were similar feelings, I think, that the early disciples must have had after the death of their beloved Master and Lord that Good Friday 2000 years ago. Their world, like ours in a way, was turned upside down in a quick moment. Here they had the joy of welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, only to witness and experience everything fall apart within five days! He was taken from them by the hypocritical liars of His own day and crucified before their eyes. The world, as they knew it, was grossly unjust with its own versions of political unrest, plagues, earthquakes, and fires. Even the Son of God was not immune to the disease of man's sin which pinned Him to the Cross. Even today, our sins continue to crucify Him. So, our world today is turned on its head, and we find ourselves with eyes cast down, wondering and afraid. What will the future hold in store for us? Is there a reason to explain all of this? "Why, Lord?" we might ask. The same kinds of questions and confusion must have overwhelmed the early disciples that Good Friday 2000 years ago. Seemingly, nothing has changed in one sense – then, as now.

For several weeks now, none of us could have imagined the situation we are experiencing; yet, we are beginning to find our own "new routine" of coping and managing the situation as best we can. We are getting somewhat used to the "new order," even though we may think we can all go back to the same routine "when it's all over" -- perhaps not exactly as the same as before. The current circumstances have prevented us from gathering for Mass, especially on Sundays.

The church remains open during regular hours, but the absence of the Mass is so strange for you – and I dare say for myself as a priest. Without the public offering of Mass, though, we are still united by bonds of faith, hope, and love and through our personal prayer and sacrifices can mature spiritually. So, I thought I could offer you some reflections as we go through this unique time of worship together.

So, the disciples' eyes were downcast. They are depressed and fearful, lonely and abandoned. In the midst of all of that experience, powerful as it was (and powerful as it is for us, too, under our own circumstances), Jesus appears to them and does what He so brilliantly always does: He asks a question. "What are you discussing as you walk along?" He knows what they are talking about, of course. He knows everything. But He asks because He wants them to reveal their need, their desire, their hearts. They respond in so many words, "Don't you know?" Imagine Jesus not having a clue! So, He asks another question, "What sort of things?" Then, finally, our divine Lord admonishes them with the words, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe ..." In our Lord's perfected human nature, in glorified flesh and blood, He continues to show pity: "Don't you get it?" our Lord could well ask in contemporary tone! Or, "After all that I've taught you, after all that I've done for you, after all that was prophesied about me, after all that I said would happen .... After all of this, you still don't believe me?" It's almost as though Jesus "has had it" with them! He's not angry; no, He's just tired of their unbelief. So, He might well ask another question: "What will it take for me to convince you again that I am alive and risen from the dead?" (Maybe He's tired, too, OUR unbelief? Tired, perhaps, of just no belief at all. I wonder.)

So, what does He do? He re-presents one of the most beautiful and powerful memories they had of Him: Holy Thursday night at the Last Supper. He goes in to have supper with them. Luke writes, "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."

Isn't that, dear friends, what our divine Lord does for us even now? He re-presents Himself under the forms of Bread and Wine, as He has done since that first Mass on Holy Thursday, and says those immortal words, "This is my body ... This is my Blood." That's what the disciples remembered most, it seems. Jesus had changed the ritual of the Passover Meal that holy night before His death with

those incredible words. These are the same words said over the elements of Bread and Wine today at this Mass, at every Mass in the world, since that first Mass celebrated personally by our High Priest, Jesus the Christ. And this was one of the most powerful moments for his young Jewish followers. It had never been done before. He takes all of the Old Testament's Law and Prophets and fulfills them all perfectly in Himself. We don't need to look too far to find the entire truth of God and Man outlined and beautifully orchestrated than in the Life, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the divine-human God-Man.

And at the very moment He said those immortal words in the disciples' presence, their eyes were OPENED, and they remembered immediately not WHAT was going on but WHO it was. "They recognized Him." Can you imagine their shock, their exhilarating joy? It must have caused them to cry with tears of love and profound gratitude. He was alive. He was not dead. He had returned to them. He had not lied. He had not given them false hopes. He had not promised what He would not say He would. They were not abandoned. They had been found again. They had regained their belief – this time, a belief beyond any doubt. No more fear, no more anxiety. They were at peace. "So, they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem" to tell the others. Note that Jesus doesn't tell the others; He expects THEM to tell the others. He expects US to tell the others.

And what shall we say to the others? We can't say anything to the others until we ourselves are convinced in faith beyond doubt that Jesus is Lord and God and has been raised from the dead. We have, dear friends, 2000 years of faith and belief in the Resurrection of Jesus under our belts. These two disciples in today's Gospel had roughly three years of Jesus' ministry and three days to mourn his death! If our Lord were to find us now on "the road" with eyes downcast, with hearts heavy with fear and doubt and despair, would we recognize Him as did they in the breaking of the bread? Yet, isn't that what happens here at Mass? That's why the Mass is Jesus' gift to us. It's a gift through HIS Church, HIS Body and HIS Blood on earth made possible again and again and again until the end of time, so that we can recognize Him again and again and again, and so that we can go out and tell others that Good News!

With all of that in mind and heart today, as we walk along our own road to Emmaus, on whichever road you travel today, at home alone or with some family or friends, raise your eyes up at the moment of the consecration at this Mass and

say with Thomas, "My Lord and my God!" Say with the disciples, "Lord, stay with us." Say with the Church for 2000 years, "AMEN! I believe!" We have so much to give thanks for today. Let our eyes be opened and recognize Him in the breaking of the bread, for the Bread that is broken is His Life for the world and the Wine becomes His Blood poured out for our sins. Yes, our Lord desires to have supper with us once again. And once again, Jesus wants us to recognize Him in the breaking of the bread as did those first disciples 2000 years ago. Here, at this Mass and every Mass offered until the end of time, Jesus remains closest to us He possibly can: Body to body and Blood to blood. If our eyes have become closed because of fear or doubt or despair, or for any other reasons, today let our eyes be opened again and recognize our Lord and our God who stays with us today and who stays with us through His Church always until we see Him face to face and behold Him in glorified Body and glorified Blood at the eternal banquet of heaven.

50 days of Easter joy to you! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!