

Year of the Eucharist and St. Joseph

Homily Aid: Third Sunday in Easter – April 18, 2021 – *The Presence of Christ in the Word*

- In today's Gospel, Jesus – alive and risen from the dead – shares a meal with his disciples and “opens their minds to understand the Scriptures” (Luke 24:45). We, too, join Jesus today alive and present with us at a meal – this Mass – during which He wants to open our minds to understand the Scriptures.
- The proclamation of God's Word is central to the Eucharistic Meal and not some prelude to it: “The Church is nourished spiritually at **the twofold table of God's word and of the Eucharist**... The celebration of Mass in which the Word is heard and the Eucharist is offered and received forms but **one single act of divine worship**” (*Introduction to the Lectionary*, 10).
 - “In the readings, the table of God's Word is spread before the faithful, and the treasures of the Bible are opened to them” (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 57).
 - At Mass, we can encounter Jesus speaking to us through the readings, which are the living Word of God. When we truly listen to Jesus, He nourishes us and sets a fire within our own hearts, just as He did with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. In fact, “**the liturgy is the privileged setting in which God speaks to us in the midst of our lives**; he speaks to his people, who hear and respond” (*Verbum Domini*, 52).
- At Mass God invites us into dialogue with Him
 - Our readings are far more than an opportunity to learn about God; they are an opportunity to speak with God
 - But many of us wonder in prayer: “How can I hear God's voice? What does He want to say to me?”
 - At Mass, we hear the Word of God spoken directly and personally to each of us!
 - The Word of God comes to us in human words, which have the ability to penetrate our hearts through the power of God who knows us each so intimately (see Hebrews 4:12)
 - God speaks to the Church, the community at large, and to the individual person
- **“In this dialogue with God we come to understand ourselves and we discover an answer to our heart's deepest questions.”** (*Verbum Domini*, 23)
 - With all of life's uncertainties, fears, and stresses, we are always in search of peace. We try to find it in other people, money, success, affirmations, etc. This true peace can be found in Christ alone.
 - God has loved us so much that he has inspired human authors to write in such a way as to reveal God and to offer an encounter with Christ himself. We must pay attention to the Word of God – it has the power to move into the depths of our hearts to give us a peace and fill us with a joy which we perhaps never thought could exist within us.
- The readings for each Mass have been specifically chosen and organized by the Church for each weekday and Sunday
 - At Sunday Mass, we hear the Word of God in the First Reading; we speak to him with our voices in the Responsorial Psalm; we listen again in the Second Reading; we respond with the Gospel acclamation; and we stand to hear Jesus speak to each of us in the Gospel
 - The First Reading and the Gospel are chosen to relate with each other; the First Reading is usually from the Old Testament, giving us a foretaste of the Gospel message and often times magnifying the Gospel
 - In hearing the First Reading, we can experience it as the Lord reminding us of his patient love and how he has prepared us for so long to be ready for the coming of Christ – which we experience in the Gospel!
 - In Easter, we hear in the First Reading the Acts of the Apostles as we enter liturgically into the New Covenant of the Resurrection and the beginning of the Church's mission
 - The Second Reading follows its own structure each week and does not intentionally tie into the First Reading and Gospel – except in special solemnities or seasons.
 - Usually, we hear the words of St. Paul or one of the other letters in the Second Reading. They take us into the heart of the early Church with words that still ring true in our hearts today! O God, ever-ancient and ever-new!
 - **The Gospel is the high point of the readings.** Everyone stands (symbolizing resurrection) and sings the Alleluia (except during Lent), greeting and welcoming Christ who will speak to us in the Gospel [heightened reverence!]
- The Church encourages us to prepare for Mass by praying with the Sunday readings throughout the week, so that God's Word might grow and live within us more deeply – thus enabling us to know his voice and hear Him more clearly at Mass
 - We can also pray with the readings on Monday to “relive” Mass on Sunday
- Recall the Road to Emmaus. When did the disciples realize it was Jesus? As Jesus spoke to them on the way and opened the Scriptures to them, their hearts burned within them and their eyes were opened in the breaking of the bread. So too, Jesus wants to reveal himself to us today and every Sunday. Will we allow our hearts to burn for the Lord who is with us and for his Word living in us?

Note: Pope Francis has declared the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time of each year to be the **Sunday of the Word of God**, which “is to be devoted to the celebration, study, and dissemination of the Word of God” (Apostolic Letter, *Aperuit Illis*).