

## THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER "A" 2020

Yesterday I read a story about a guy who went scuba diving. He was enjoying the aquatic world 20 feet below the surface when he noticed another guy at the same depth he was, but the guy had no scuba gear.

The scuba diver descended another 20 ft. and, a few moments later, there was that same guy. The diver went down another 25 feet, and soon the same guy joined him. This confused the diver. So he took out a waterproof chalk-and-board set and wrote, *“How on earth are you able to stay under water this deep without scuba gear?”*

The guy took the board and chalk, erased what the diver had written, and quickly wrote, *“I'm DROWNING, YOU GOOBER!!!”*

Like that scuba diver, sometimes we have a difficult time recognizing the obvious, right in front of us. It was the problem that the two disciples in today's Gospel had.

The story of the road to Emmaus isn't just a lovely tale from the past. It is our story. The journey that those two disciples took long ago is the same journey every Christian soul must take to encounter the life and power of the Risen Jesus.

When St. Luke penned this Gospel story, he was writing to his community of faith that—like our lives—had to face the death of their hopes and dreams and the feelings of deep sadness, grief, disappointment, and loss. This covid-19 virus has caused so much fear in our lives—fear about our health and safety, fear

about our livelihoods, fear about the national economy and our future.

Like the two disciples at the beginning of today's Gospel, we, too, "*were hoping*" for so many things. We were hoping that we would hold on to our job, or that our marriage would survive and thrive, or that our loved one would not die, or that our teenager would not get hooked on drugs, or we were hoping that this pandemic would get over quickly and our lives could return to normal. But then, our hopes were dashed. But St. Luke reminds us that our story—like the two disciples' story, and especially like Jesus' story—doesn't end with the initial death of our hopes and dreams.

**In his beautiful story, St. Luke gives us three clues or hints** as to how we can find God's power, His strength and consolation when we face the deaths of our hopes and dreams, when we encounter crises in our lives, just as the disciples did when faced with loss in their lives. St. Luke shows us how to recognize the "obvious" of the Divine in our midst.

**The first clue in St. Luke's story is the Scriptures.** If you remember, the distressed and grieving disciples were excitedly talking, as they walked on the road to Emmaus. Then, a stranger approached and they shared with Him their distress, their anxiety, and hurt. After listening to them, what did Jesus do? *Jesus opened to them the Scriptures.* St. Luke is reminding us that in *our* grief, in *our* sadness, in *our* anxiety as we face *our* crises and losses in life—the first step to hope and strength is to open up the Scriptures.

And so we open the Scriptures, and, as we cast our eyes here and there, what is it we read? We read Jesus saying, “*I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in me shall never die.*” We certainly believe in Jesus and we believe that He has risen from the dead. If Jesus has the power to do that, then Jesus has the power to resurrect our hopes, our dreams and our lives.

Or in the first reading today from the Acts of the Apostles, we hear, “*This one, 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.*” Again, we hear the promise that, like Jesus, one day God will resurrect us and our shattered hopes.

That’s the Good News we need to hear because many of our hopes have been crushed by the circumstances of life and especially by this pandemic. Just as Jesus used the Scriptures with the disciples on the road to Emmaus to reveal His Risen presence and His plan, if we pray with the Scriptures regularly, Jesus will break open that Word for us and He will explain the Scriptures to us and how they apply to our lives. And, in time, Jesus will reveal how He will use our problems and this crisis to grow His Risen Life within us.

**The second clue that St. Luke gives is that the distraught disciples finally recognized Jesus in “*the breaking of the bread,*” which is the ancient name for the Holy Eucharist.** St. Luke reminds us that, in the Eucharist, we are assured that we are never alone—not in life, not in death, and certainly not in the midst of our problems. In this holy Sacrament, we believe and

recognize that the One who is at table with us will always abide with us: *“I am the bread of life. And whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in me, and I will raise him up on the last day.”* How we need to remember this when we are experiencing problems and God seems so absent!

Brothers and sisters, if you would choose only one spiritual practice that you would be faithful to all your life, promise Jesus that you will attend the Holy Mass faithfully—every Sunday—and, if possible, every day. The Eucharist is the central Sacrament and the center of the entire sacramental life that Jesus left His Church. Not only will Jesus nourishes you through the Eucharist, but this gift will be an anchor for your life to hold you safe in the storms of life. And I guarantee you, and even more importantly, Jesus guarantees you, that you will always meet His Risen, Real Presence in the holy Eucharist and you will find the strength you need.

**The final hint that St. Luke gives to help us come to terms with the death of our hopes and dreams is the Community of Faith, the Church.** If you remember, at the beginning of the story, the disciples were walking to Emmaus, away from Jerusalem, and away from the community of faith. At the end of Luke’s story, the first thing the disciples did when they understood the good news of Scriptures and recognized Jesus in the *“breaking of the bread,”* they turned around and went back to the community in Jerusalem.

And here’s the final clue for the healing and consoling of grieving hearts, and that is the community—the community of our personal families—the community of our parish family and

universal church. It is in these faith communities that we freely share our hurts, our pains, our hopes, and our love. It is in these communities that we find the love, the encouragement and support we need.

This is a great challenge in our modern world. There is a schizophrenic illness in the faith life of many people who think they can simply believe in Jesus, and not belong to His Body, the Church. They think that they can be people of deep faith without belonging and participating in a local parish community of faith.

People who live this way unknowingly have resurrected an ancient heresy called Docetism which taught that Jesus did not have a real human body. Jesus did have a real human body and nature, and He still does. It is the Church. If we want to find the fullness of the resurrected life of Jesus—if we want His power to flow into our lives— if we want to experience the support and healing of Jesus, it is found most fully and most profoundly in the Church.

Like the scuba diver who missed the obvious that the other man descending into the depths without scuba gear was drowning, we sometimes have a hard time recognizing the obvious. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus had the same problem. That's why this story isn't just a lovely tale from the past. It is our story. The journey that those two disciples took long ago is the same journey every Christian soul must take.

Just like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we also can encounter the Risen Lord who will open our eyes, who will inflame our hearts, and who give us the strength and consolation we need to face the trials of life. All we need to do is to follow St. Luke's three clues.

In the midst of our uncertainties, our losses, our doubts, and our fears: 1) if we are willing to open the Scriptures regularly and enter a conversation of prayer with the Lord; 2) if we are willing to make the Eucharist, “*the breaking of the bread,*” the center of our lives and share in the Eucharist often; and 3) if we are willing to reconnect with our communities of faith—our personal families and the parish family—for love, support and encouragement, then we will encounter the Risen Christ.

Through these three gifts, the Risen Jesus will make sense of what is happening in our lives. And what we “*were really hoping for*” will be resurrected, and the powerful presence of the Risen Christ, will touch and transform our lives and our problems.