

Fr. Ryan's Homily April 26, 2020

Read Luke 24:13-35

Well this time of year during the Easter season is just about everywhere that the season on kids making their 1st Communion. And each year we get to see those little one's process into church, the boys all spiffed up in their suit and tie and the girls in their white dresses and it's such a day of celebration isn't it, because they've been preparing and are ready to receive Jesus for the first time in the Eucharist. That is one of the most important, special, memorable days in any of our lives as Catholics. Well this year that special moment has been put on hold. It's still gonna happen, and when it does it will be just as special, we just don't know right now exactly when it's gonna be. We probably still have a few weeks if not months left to go. And I hope for those preparing for their 1st Communion that their hunger, that their desire to be united with Jesus in that way, that it keeps growing and getting stronger and stronger in their hearts. But if you really think about it just about everyone this year is preparing for their 1st Communion. Their 1st Communion after public mass can be celebrated again. And for everyone I hope the desire, the longing to receive Jesus in the Eucharist grows stronger and stronger as these weeks keep ticking by. Maybe for some people, mass had just become very routine, more of an obligation than a relationship. Maybe receiving the Holy Eucharist didn't excite us anymore. It was just one thing among many that we do as Catholics. And now all of a sudden it's not there anymore and we can feel this void in our lives, that the Lord is using this time to stir the flame of love for Him in our hearts. And all Catholics are getting to experience this anticipation of preparing for their 1st Communion again. So, what are you and what is your family doing? What prayers are you offering so that your hearts continue to burn for the Holy Eucharist. Now that's actually what today's Gospel is all about. I don't know if you realized that as you were hearing (reading) that but what is Jesus doing for these two disciples? He is celebrating mass for them. So, it's the day of the resurrection and these two disciples are leaving Jerusalem and they're disheartened because they think their hope in Jesus wasn't in vain. But as they're walking along, Jesus meets them on the road, and he starts walking with them and talking with them and they invite him to stay the evening with them. And as they're together Jesus, He starts saying the mass because it says he took the Old Testament readings, the readings of Moses and the prophets, and he broke

them open and he explains them. Well what do we call that? Well that's the first part of mass, it's the Liturgy of the Word and the Homily, so that's the first part. Now, even after Jesus who was God and was preaching to them and he's being present to them, it wasn't enough for Jesus to just do that was it? Because when the disciples invited Jesus in, what did they say to him? They said, stay with us. Stay with us. Not stay with us for a little while and we can talk some more then you can move on. No, stay with us from now on. Stay with us always. And how does Jesus stay with them and with us always? It's in the breaking of the bread. Jesus gives them himself in the Eucharist. That's where Jesus is when he stays with us, in the Holy Eucharist. And we as Catholics see what Jesus is doing here as a blueprint for the mass and it's something that the earliest Christians as well believed in. They believed the same thing. I don't know if you'd ever heard of this guy before but there's this guy named St. Justin Martyr, and Justin was born around 90 AD, so about only 60 years after this Gospel took place, and Justin died about 150 AD. So, this is right in the very beginning, and this is what Justin Martyr says all the way back then in some of his writings. Justin says we do not receive the Eucharistic bread and wine as if it was ordinary food and drink. For we have been taught that if Jesus Christ our savior became man of flesh and blood by the power of the word of God so also the food that our flesh and blood assimilates for its nourishment becomes the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus. By the power of his own words contained in the prayer of thanksgiving. That's what Justin Martyr is saying. So, what does that mean? It means that what is bread and wine at the beginning of mass become the body and blood of Jesus once the priest prays the prayer of thanksgiving over them, prays the words of Jesus over them. It means that the same Jesus that we're hearing about in this Gospel, the same Jesus who was born and walked the face of the earth, the same Jesus who died and rose from the dead, is the same Jesus we receive at mass. The same Jesus who made the hearts of these two disciples burn within them. And that's why we should never approach the altar at mass like its ho-hum, like it is just another thing. Because there will never be anything more important to us that we every do, nothing that will be more special than to receive Jesus in the Eucharist. That is how he stays with his church, even now. Okay the red sanctuary light next to the tabernacle in church is still burning. It's right behind me as I'm speaking these words to you. Jesus is still there in the Eucharist, inside the tabernacle, staying with us. And he's waiting for the day his people can return to him there. So, the

question never is will Jesus stay with us because YES, he is with us perpetually. The question always is, will we stay with him. Will our hearts continue to burn for him as his heart continues to burn for us? And so, this period that we're in right now is a period of testing. Our perseverance is being tested. It's a testing of our willingness to keep our hearts burning for Jesus or to see if we're okay with living our life without the Eucharist, to see if the embers in our hearts grow colder and colder as the weeks pass by. Some of my fellow priests that I'm able to stay in touch with, I think I can speak for all of us in saying our hope out of all of this is that churches will be bursting at the seams because people are so hungry to get back to mass, so hungry to receive the Eucharist again. And I think that I can speak for all of us again in saying our concern coming out of all of this is that numbers will be down because folks have gotten used to the "new normal" and they don't see the need to return. That if our hearts were lukewarm going into all of this, what will they be at the end? And so I go back to my question at the beginning, what are you and what is your family doing, praying so that your hearts continue to burn for the Holy Eucharist during this time. Because again the question never is will Jesus stay with us, the question is will we stay with Him? Will our love for Him not grow dim, is this time making me hungrier and hungrier for Jesus? And are you praying for your fellow parishioners that their desire for the Eucharist stays strong as well. So today as not just the would-be 1st Communicants are continuing to prepare to receive Jesus for the first time, but all Catholics prepare to receive Jesus again in the Eucharist. Know that Jesus always wants to stay with you. There will never be a day in your life when Jesus won't want to be with you. And he proves it by remaining present in the Eucharist. Present with his own flesh and blood. And if you remain faithful for this time and the rest of your life to the Eucharist, He makes you a promise. What's the promise that He makes to you when you remain faithful to his body, blood, soul, and divinity, what happens? Jesus says you are going to live forever. You get to live forever. And sometimes we need to be reminded of that promise; receiving the Eucharist makes us live forever! One priest I remember said that sometimes we have to tell our faces meaning that we have to be more joyful of this great gift of the Eucharist. So today we can smile and rejoice; the Eucharist is still on this planet and there will be a day soon, we don't know when exactly yet, but there will be a day when you get to receive 1st Communion again. And what a joyful day that is going to be. Now everyone has the joy of preparing for 1st Communion all

over again. And we're being reminded of the great gift, the great privilege we have of receiving the body and blood of Jesus. There is NOTHING more important because when we eat his flesh and drink his blood, He says we will live forever. He also says, if we don't receive it, we have no life within us. Now He's not referring to this moment in history of course because mass isn't available. But normally, that's how serious Jesus is about the Eucharist, that without it, we have no life within us. Many people make things other than Jesus more important, but those things don't last. Money doesn't last. Position doesn't last. Power doesn't last. One day it just goes (snaps) like that. And it's on. But Jesus lasts forever, and His love lasts forever. And as long as you embrace Him, He will embrace you. His heart is always, always burning for us. Will our hearts, though tested, continue to burn for Him. And I'll leave you with this prayer of spiritual communion maybe so that you can pray by yourself or with your family.

We pray: My Jesus, I believe that you are present in the most Blessed Sacrament. I love you above all things and I desire to receive you into my soul. My heart burns for love of you. But since I cannot now receive you sacramentally, come at least spiritually into my heart. I embrace you as if you are already there and unite myself wholly to you. Never permit me to be separated from you. May I see this time as a period of preparation to allow me to fan the flames of love in my heart so that it burns ever brighter and I may receive you with the greatest joy at the very moment the Holy Eucharist is available to me again.

Amen