

**Third Sunday of Easter
April 6, 2008**

Homily

We continue to participate in and celebrate with joy the Lord's death and resurrection. Our gospel today is one of the most loved stories of that first Easter day.

Two disciples of Jesus, overwhelmed by the events of Good Friday, have lost heart and have decided to leave the community and return home.

The risen Lord Jesus joins them on the road and engages them in conversation, which immediately turns to the passion of the Lord. They mention the reports of the women and apostles about the resurrection, but obviously they do not put any faith in their reports.

As happens every time we celebrate Eucharist, the risen Lord breaks open the scriptures, the Old Testament, to help them understand that everything that happened to Jesus had been foretold; it was all a part of God's saving plan for all eternity.

Then, at table, Jesus reveals himself to them in the breaking of the bread, the key action of every Eucharist. This beautiful gospel parallels what happens at every Mass: the risen Lord is present among us, although we do not always recognize him; the scripture readings and the homily break open the word to help us understand God's loving, saving action in our lives and in our world; and in the liturgy of the Eucharist, the risen Lord gives himself to us to free us to live as his disciples.

Our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles gives us Peter's first great proclamation of the mysteries that are at the heart

of our faith. This is his message to the crowds on the first Pentecost. Peter proclaims the death and resurrection of the Lord, and then asserts that “death could not hold him.” He quotes Psalm 18, attributed to King David. Death, from a theological perspective rather than a biological one, could not hold Jesus because he had conquered death on the cross.

Theologically, death is a separation from God through our sin and rebellion. Jesus, through his complete obedience to the will of the Father, overcame death in the theological sense. Therefore death could not hold him. Theologically, biological death has always been seen simply as a physical sign of the effects of sin, separation from God who is life.

Our second reading from the First Letter of Peter, reminds us that we have been ransomed, liberated, from the power of death through the precious blood of Christ, the Passover lamb.

In later Judaism, the Passover lamb took on the meaning of ransoming the people from sin, or expiating the sin of the people. This interpretation gave the early church a way of understanding the salvation Christ won for us by his death and resurrection. Our passage concludes with Peter affirming that our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus gives us hope of final participation in his glory.

The Paschal mystery is at the heart of our faith. The passion, death, and resurrection of the Lord are one saving event. While we rejoice in the resurrection, we cannot easily put aside our awareness of his suffering and death. That is a crushing reality, and its pain remains with us even as we struggle to understand and celebrate the glory of his resurrection. We remember the second beatitude: Blessed are they who mourn; they will be comforted. The mourning is now: we have faith and hope that in the future, we will be comforted.