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**“Homily for the Third Sunday of Easter”
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Dear friends in Christ:

Introduction

During the Easter Season which we are now celebrating, the liturgical texts invite us to contemplate the wonder of the Risen Christ by recounting his various appearances to Mary Magdalene and the other women who went to the tomb at the crack of dawn the day after the Sabbath; to the Eleven gathered in the Upper Room; to the disciples on the shore of the lake and their breakfast together; and today, to two very ordinary disciples, one called Cleopas and the other unnamed. Some scholars have identified this unknown disciple as “Mary, wife of Clopas,” whom John places with the faithful women at the foot of the Cross (cf. Jn 19:25).

Before looking more closely at the encounter of these two disciples with the Risen Lord on the road to Emmaus, allow me to say just a word about how his appearances invite us to deepen our understanding of the Easter message, how they are good news for us and for our salvation. The appearances are foundational events in the life of the Church. They

tell us something about the greatest mystery of all: who God is. They disclose to us something about each of the divine Persons.

1. Revelation of the Divine Persons

1. The Son: Link of Incarnation and Resurrection

The mystery of the Son's living the adventure of human life among us is confirmed and "eternalized," so to speak, because of his Resurrection from the dead. Easter reveals to us more fully who Jesus really is. Not only is he the One who "has come in the flesh" (I Jn 4:2), who was crucified for our sins as a public spectacle before the world, he remains *forever* united to his humanity, now glorified. He sits at the right hand of the Father, where he makes intercession for us. The Son did not just take on a body for 33 years only to leave it behind in the grave! Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (cf. Heb 13:8)!

The whole sacramental life of the Church, centered on the Eucharist, makes sense only if, as Peter proclaimed on that first Pentecost as related in our first reading, he was neither "abandoned to the nether world nor did his flesh see corruption" (Acts 2:32). The corpse of Jesus hauled down from the Cross stood for the seeming victory of death over life. But God took precisely that same body and raised it up as the first fruit of the new creation. If Jesus' body had corrupted, we would have no basis for our optimistic vision of creation –

“and God saw that it was good/very good” – and of its final destiny – *our* own resurrection from the dead.

Had he not risen from the dead, the throes of death would have triumphed, and we would have only an idea or a “cause,” not the Living One, to celebrate. The post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus forcefully remind us that Redemption does not entail *escape* from the world, but God’s willingness to transform precisely this fallen world with its history of sin and suffering. This transformation has already begun and promised in his raising Jesus bodily from the dead.

Because of the Resurrection, humanity, with whom the Son has united himself, likewise returns to God in a bodily or sacramental way. As the Father raised his Son’s sacred humanity to glory, in the same way he reaches us through the Incarnation, which is now prolonged forever.

2. The Power of God the Father

In New Testament tradition, the Resurrection is God the Father’s definitive action in salvation history. He is the One who raised Jesus! God reveals himself as the One whose power is such that he can give new life where death had seemed to be triumphant.

In the original creation *ex nihilo*, God showed his power over nothingness as the author of life. But, in raising Jesus from the dead, he reveals the beginning of the new creation, his power over death caused by man’s sin.

The post-Resurrection encounters, then, allow us to grasp a little better what it means for God to be “divine.”

3. Spirit Flows as Gift of Death and Resurrection

In his great Pentecost homily, Peter also connects the Resurrection to the gift of the Spirit, who descended on Mary and the Apostles only after Christ had been “exalted at the right hand of God” (Acts 2:33). This is Luke’s presentation of what John wrote in his Gospel, when he coupled the Resurrection with the gift of the Spirit that took place on Easter eve, a gift given for continued reconciliation in a sinful world.

2. Revelation on the Road to Emmaus

This evening’s Gospel, with the account of Jesus’ encounter with the two disciples gives us a glimpse of the way in which the Risen Lord was active in the very early community of believers and how he remains so today in our midst.

1. Disputation

The disciples walking to Emmaus were engaged in lively conversation, “conversing and debating” says the text. Think of them, if you can, as two professors. They were downcast and disillusioned, it seems, because their adventure with Jesus had ended in failure. Their faith had run out. This early *quaestio disputata* touched them directly.

Moreover, they were unwilling to accept an answer with evidence from elsewhere. For reasons based more on prejudice and the

preconception of a “closed” world view. The witness of the women and of the other disciples was discounted as unreliable and unconvincing. This unwillingness to accept the testimony of others is a trait, I believe, that those in the academy readily understand. The two disciples almost seem to enjoy the sad, even tragic, conclusions they had come to.

Like a Master Teacher, Jesus suddenly breaks into their conversation. But the eyes of their hearts are not yet ready to “recognize” him. Since they doubted what he had promised, he hid the sight of his face from them – or perhaps it is better to say – they were incapable of recognizing him because their categories wouldn’t allow it. To encounter the Risen Lord requires more than physical proximity. Immediately the Stranger begins with a question, indicating his desire to take part in their conversation and argument. “What are you discussing as you walk along?” he asks. This is the first of five questions in the account – perhaps the earliest version of the question and answer format familiar to those raised on the Baltimore Catechism.

The two disciples reply, poignantly expressing that they had hoped “that he would be the one to redeem Israel.” What follows in the account of the events is the longest speech in the Gospels by someone other than Jesus.

Determination

Then the Stranger intervenes once again. His response to the disciples' narration is quick and emphatic. He calls them "foolish" and rebukes them with a reminder of what Jesus had said, and he puts to them another question, one to which they should know the answer: "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?"

What follows is an exegesis of the Scriptures, undoubtedly the most authoritative ever, in which Jesus told them his own story and interpreted it for them. He seems to have spoken in such a way that they corrected their erroneous views. Like a medieval Master, he solves the problem, giving a *determinatio*, a resolution explaining how the Scriptures were fulfilled in him.

They were introduced to a deeper understanding of the Scriptures, one which "burned" their hearts. No dry *Redaktionsgeschichte* this! What Jesus did, Luke says, was "open the Scriptures" to them. Their hearts "burned" because the Stranger breathed new life on the embers of the internal fire of their hearts, a fire which had almost gone out. But even this explanation was not enough for them to "recognize" him, even if they felt the effects of the power of his Word.

3. Generosity at Arrival

We have, up to this point, a kind of framework for the Liturgy of the Word: an “opening of Scripture” – its proclamation and living interpretation – and the beginning of a change of heart on the part of those who listen. A second step is necessary for the fullness of recognition. When the disciples offer the Stranger hospitality, when they “put the word into practice” and say, “Stay with us,” in this way they prepare for the greater revelation: what took place when the Stranger blessed and broke the bread. This completes the diptych, the icon of the Sacred Liturgy: Word and Sacrament.

Then their eyes were opened. Yet, at that very instant, Jesus vanished from their sight. As soon as they recognized him, he disappeared. Despite appearances, he does not abandon, however, the two disciples who have now welcomed him. Rather, their table Companion turns to the Father who has glorified him and rises to him, so that he can be with everyone, everywhere – totally free of the constraints he had hitherto known. And so he remained also at Emmaus.

Witness: Conclusion

The Gospel ends with a return *to* Jerusalem: that Jerusalem *from* which they had set out so disillusioned. Now they are full of joy and zeal. In spite of the late hour, the two disciples to make

the return trip to tell the Eleven the good news. As it turns out, both groups bear witness to one another, and the two are greeted with the proclamation that the Lord had appeared to Simon.

We are all at the same point on the road to Emmaus. God walks with each of us as our Companion on the journey – and he does so in often surprising and hidden ways – hidden even to ourselves. He alone, by revealing his presence in the Scripture and the Breaking of the Bread, reverses the “sad” news that might burden us and lay us low in sadness. He enables us to be bearers of the power of the Risen One to everyone. This Companion takes us back with him to Jerusalem.

Catholic higher education, when it fulfills its vocation, can look to the disciples on the road to Emmaus as an icon. There is one Master Teacher who must be present, even if veiled and unknown. And there must be disciples who, as faculty and students, even if engaged in healthy dispute, see a way out of the world’s sadness, skepticism and weariness and are ready to respond to Lord in their midst, recognizing him in the authority of his Word and the wonder of his Sacrament.

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