

HOMILY — SUNDAY EASTER 3 A

Acts 2:14, 22b-28

Ps 16 R. Lord, you will show me the path of life.

1 Pt 1:17-21

Lk 24:13-35

It's been six weeks now, since we had Mass together as a Parish family. At that last Mass, we were beginning our Lenten Mission on the mystery of Divine Worship, a look at the theology of the Mass. Well, since our Gospel today is one of the Scripture passages I was going to use for the Mission, I thought I would pick up where I left off and give you another part of the Mission.

I'll put up the first talk on my SoundCloud account for those who want to listen to it again, but in the meantime, let's recap a little: Looking at the Gospel of the Samaritan Woman, we saw that the worship God seeks is one *in spirit and truth* (Jn 4:23), the very worship given to the Father by Jesus in the Holy Spirit. In other words, the sacrifice that Jesus makes of Himself on the Cross, which finds its meaning and interpretation in the Last Supper.

The Mass — or the Divine Liturgy — is the re-living of this one acceptable sacrifice of worship. At every Mass, through the Holy Spirit we join ourselves to the worship that Jesus offers the Father. And in the same way that the Passover sacrifice and meal was something given to Israel by God, which had to be done exactly according to His directions, so too is the Mass. The Mass isn't something we do according to our own whims, our own rules, but according to the directions that God Himself has given us.

You're probably thinking to yourself right now, 'Wait a minute, Father, what do you mean? The Church gives us the directives for Mass; why do you say they come from God?'

Well, there are two sets of elements for the Mass: there are human elements set by the Church, which are subject to change. For example, the vestments required for Mass: the styles, shapes, colours and even requirements have changed over the centuries for a number of different reasons. The same goes for language.

However, there are also some divine elements, which are not subject to change. These were set by God and the Church has no authority to change them in any way. This is the case with the matter used for the Eucharist: only wheat bread and grape wine can be used; nothing else could be valid, because that's what Jesus used and told us to use. This isn't tied to a cultural or historical context; it's unchangeable.

Now, did you know that the very structure of the Mass is also a divine element? Yes, it can look like Mass changed over the centuries, especially since Vatican II, but the actual structure of the Mass hasn't. That's because the Church didn't invent the structure of the Mass; she got it from today's Gospel. Had you notice that?

Let's have a quick look at the Emmaus event again. Two disciples are walking together, talking about the events of Holy Week (vv. 13-14). Jesus approaches and walks with them, first listening (v. 15), then conversing with them (v. 17), He enters into their reality — and then finally, He teaches them (vv. 25-27). Do you see it? This is the first part of the Mass, what we call the 'Liturgy of the Word'!

Whenever we gather for Mass, we do so as disciples walking together in faith and in life. And we gather first to review the events of the life of Jesus as we listen to the readings. And as we do, Jesus comes near to us. Remember how Jesus said, *where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them* (Mt 18:20)?

When we gather as disciples to pray, Christ is present! But the Church also teaches us that when the Word of God is proclaimed, when Scripture is read aloud in liturgy, Jesus is present. In fact, He's the one who speaks.

And so, Jesus draws near first to listen, then to teach. This is the homily! Just as Jesus *interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures* (v. 27), the homily is supposed to help us understand the Scriptures, so that like the disciples, we, too, can rightly say, *Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us..., while he was opening the scriptures to us* (v. 32)? Listening to the Scriptures at Mass is a living encounter with Jesus!

And all of this is intended to open our eyes to see Jesus in the *breaking of the bread*, which is how Luke refers to the Mass. The reading of Scripture for the first half of the Mass is intended to open our eyes to see Jesus in the Eucharist in the second half, and to open our hearts to receive Him in Communion, and to live according to the Word we've heard. It's the Word that becomes Flesh right before our eyes: first in the Eucharistic Jesus, then in us as His disciples!

Luke tells us that, *when [Jesus] was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them* (v. 30). Jesus *took, blessed, broke and gave...* These are the same verbs that Jesus used for the multiplication miracles and for the Last Supper, and which I repeat at every Mass: *On the night he was betrayed, he himself **took** bread, and giving you thanks, he said the **blessing**, **broke** the bread and **gave** it to his disciples...* (Eucharistic Prayer III).

At every Mass, we relive, in a sense, this event on the road to Emmaus. As we journey together as disciples and review the works of God in history and in our lives, Jesus draws near to walk with us. He listens and teaches. Then He reveals Himself to us in the Eucharist so that we can receive Him more fully and be strengthened in our life of discipleship. He feeds us with His Body and Blood, He strengthens us with His grace, and He sets our hearts on fire with His Word.

And notice how it wasn't just the hearts of the disciples that were set on fire. They were no longer looking sad, no longer hopeless... Jesus broke into their experience of suffering, of confusion, of chaos... He enters into their reality and brings His peace, His calm, His joy. This is why the Mass isn't about exuberant festivities, business or noise, but is inherently contemplative: Jesus draws near to us to bring peace, silence, calm to the busyness and chaos of our lives.

Then Luke tells us, *That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem and told [the other disciples] what had happened* (vv. 33, 35). Filled with joy in the Holy Spirit, they

immediately went forth to share the Good News. This, too, is supposed to be our reaction at the end of Mass!

Have you ever noticed how quickly Mass wraps up after Communion? And how we always close with a command to go forth? (*Go forth, the Mass is ended*, or, *Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord*, or, *Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life...*)

Just like the disciples, once we've recognised Jesus in the Eucharist — once we've experienced His Resurrection and received Him, we, too, are commissioned to go out and announce the joy that Jesus died for sinners but is now risen from the dead, eagerly granting forgiveness to all who repent.

Our mission doesn't just come from the Church, or from what I preach; our mission is given to us by Jesus and by the Eucharist. We're called to joyfully and boldly proclaim what we've seen, what we've heard, what we've received (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-5a). This isn't an add-on but is at the very heart of the Eucharistic mystery.

As we ponder on this mystery of Jesus, the Word made Flesh in the Eucharist, who died for us but now lives again, let us ask Him to draw us more deeply into this mystery, so that through His grace, we may enter more fully into His worship and bear fruit worthy of the Kingdom. Amen.