

HOMILY FOR THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER, YEAR A.

**ACTS 2:14, 22-33, PSALM 16:1-2, 5, 7-11,
1 PETER 1:17-21, LUKE 24:13-35.**

GOD RAISED THIS JESUS; OF THIS WE ARE ALL WITNESSES.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, since Easter Sunday, we have been reading and listening to accounts of post-resurrection appearances and encounters. In today's Gospel, two disciples are struggling to make sense of a recent event: the death of Jesus. They leave Jerusalem over their shoulder as the place where their hopes met with final defeat. When a stranger joins them on the road, they tell the story of their disappointment. Jesus, the one they had hoped would set Israel free, is now dead. In their story, it becomes clear that they cannot hold two things together: their hope in Jesus and His death. The death of Jesus cancels out their hope. They feel hopeless and helpless.



The two disciples cannot understand how the death of Jesus can be understood as anything other than a tragic end to a life of promise. Like most people, they believe that if you haven't achieved what you set out to do before your death, you will never achieve it in death itself. When you are dead, it's too late for everything. Death is the end of the road of promise. So, the disciples mourn not only the death of Jesus but the death of their relationship with Him. Now they are ex-disciples of a

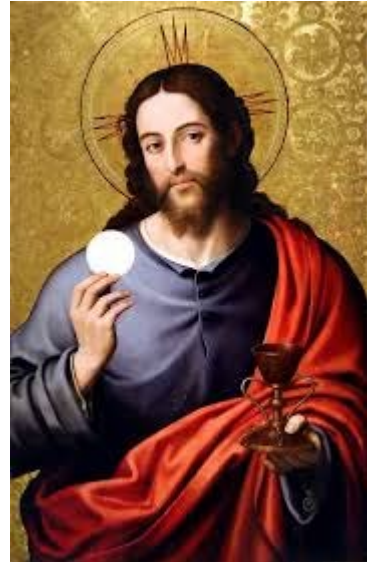
dead prophet. With faces to match their story.

Only when they have finished their own story does the stranger begin his own. He invites them to look at the past again, this time in the light of scripture. He gives a wholly different interpretation of the same event, seeing the death of Christ as essential to His glory. According to the stranger, the death of Jesus was the achievement of His mission —not the collapse of it.

As the stranger helps the two disciples make sense of the past in a new light, they invite Him to stay with them. When they go to the table, they break bread together. The stranger gives Himself away by giving Himself away to them. He is the risen

Jesus, and He leaves them with hearts that burn and eyes that see. Not only does He help them interpret the past in their new experience of Him as Lord, but He also gives them a new future. They can now face Jerusalem even in the dark, and they return there to share their story with the others.

In their new experience of Jesus as Lord, the disciples' past is changed. They can now revisit the past with the new light and love they have experienced. They take the light of Easter Sunday back into the darkness of Good Friday, and everything looks different now. Only the risen Jesus makes sense of everything that went before. In His words and in the breaking of the bread, the past is brought up to date. The past is now interpreted in the light of the great truth that Jesus is risen and is Lord.



When we gather here each week to celebrate the Eucharist, we too listen to the word of God and break bread together. Jesus comes among us not as a stranger; rather, He comes to us in word and sacrament to give us new hope to face the future with faith in Him. Our own stories may not sound very different from the two forlorn disciples on the road to Emmaus: we, too, may be covered in disappointment; we, too, may have a past that makes little sense to us. But we are invited to tell our stories to the Lord, to listen to Him as He speaks His word, and to recognize Him in the breaking of the bread. Only then can we look at the past with understanding and, with hope, look to the future.

