

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER (Year A)  
4-19-2026 Homily

I. Introduction

Once there was an artist who was commissioned to create a bronze tabernacle door for a new church being built. The tabernacle, of course, is the sacred cupboard or container behind the altar where the Eucharistic Hosts are kept. This artist was not only very talented, but also a devout Catholic, and so he decided his work should highlight the mystery and meaning of the Eucharist—and thus, he divided the door into four separate panels or sections, with each panel containing symbols of a story from the Gospels. The first panel showed six stone water jars, referring to Jesus' miracle of changing water into wine; this stood for a preview of the Eucharist, when Our Lord would change wine into His own Blood. The second panel showed five loaves and two fish, which, of course, Jesus multiplied into enough food to feed five thousand people; this represented a promise of the Eucharist, in which Jesus gives Himself as the living bread come down from Heaven. The third panel showed thirteen people around a table—an obvious reference to Jesus and the apostles at the Last Supper, where our Savior instituted the Eucharist as a perpetual memorial: one made present every time we celebrate Mass. Finally, the fourth panel showed three people seated at a table, standing for the scene in today's Gospel in which the two disciples on the road to Emmaus recognized their Lord in the breaking of bread; the artist intended this to represent the celebration of the Eucharist.

Thus, the four panels on the tabernacle door showed the miracle of Cana, where the Eucharist was *previewed*; the multiplication of the loaves and fish, where the Eucharist was *promised*; the Last Supper, where it was *instituted*; and the setting at Emmaus, where it was *celebrated* (Mark Link, S.J., *Illustrated Sunday Homilies*, Year A, Series II, p. 35). The Eucharistic liturgy, or Mass, is indeed at the heart of our Catholic Faith and our worship of God, and only in Heaven will we fully understand what a miracle and privilege it is to gather together and participate in the Supper of the Lord. This is the moment and the place where we are closest to Heaven while still on earth—and if we truly want to know and serve Jesus and grow in holiness, we must humbly and gratefully open our hearts to this mystery of grace.

II. Development

God's ways are truly wonderful and amazing, and far beyond anything we might imagine or expect. St. Peter tells us in the 2nd Reading that, as part of the Lord's age-old plan of salvation, we were ransomed from our lives of sin, futility, and suffering by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, Who is the true, spotless and unblemished Lamb of God. In the 1st Reading from the Acts of the Apostles, St. Peter—speaking in Jerusalem to a vast crowd on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, fifty days after Easter—proclaimed that God raised Jesus from the dead in fulfillment of the prophecies, making possible our salvation from sin and our new life of grace. This was not a one-time event, however. By instituting the Eucharist and then entrusting this mystery to the Church, Our Lord made it possible for His followers to share in His divine life in an ongoing and miraculous way—that is, by worthily receiving Him in Holy Communion at every Mass we attend. This is meant to be the high point of our week, our most serious duty or obligation, and our most wonderful experience of grace, fellowship, and love, and thus an indispensable preparation for life in God's Kingdom.

### III. Conclusion

Throughout the Church's history, Catholics have risked their lives in order to gather for the Eucharist. This was true in ancient Rome, where they secretly met in the catacombs; in Elizabethan England, where faithful Catholics hid their priests from government informants and agents seeking to arrest, torture, and execute them; and in Mexico early in the 20th century, where the authorities waged a fierce war on the Church. During World War II a priest arrested and imprisoned in a concentration camp patiently saved a tiny piece of bread, and a few drops of wine he had made from a couple of smuggled grapes, and one night silently said Mass while lying in his bunk. In the 1960s a priest imprisoned in Communist China was assigned to an outdoor work party on Christmas Day; he and another prisoner hid in a large ditch, out of sight from the guards, and there the priest said the Christmas Mass from memory, with the prisoner acting as his altar server and saying the Latin responses. Today there are Catholics who gather secretly for Mass in Communist or Muslim nations around the world, quite often risking their freedom and even their lives. Even where religious persecution isn't a problem, some members of the Church face extreme poverty, physical hardship, or lack of transportation; there are places in Africa, for instance, where believers have to walk several hours in extreme heat just to attend Sunday Mass—and are quite willing and happy to do so. It's not in the relatively safe and prosperous nations of Europe and North America that the Church is experiencing her greatest renewal and growth, but in Africa—where, amid poverty and struggle, the greatest spiritual richness and renewal is to be found.

Most Catholics in the West do not have a sufficient appreciation of the Eucharist, or a realization of the holy and miraculous things that are happening here at Mass. Though we can't see them, there is every reason to believe that many angels and saints join us here for the liturgy—most especially the Blessed Virgin Mary, who is never separated from her Son. If it's a saint's feast day, that citizen of Heaven is certainly present with us. If the Mass is being offered for a deceased person who happens to be in purgatory, God in His mercy will often let him or her join us here in church. When I stand at the altar, it's quite likely the Lord allows priests now in purgatory to come here and concelebrate the Mass—thereby hastening the purification process that's necessary before they can enter Heaven. Our deceased loved ones already in Heaven can see us when we're here in church, and they're praying that we will not underestimate or waste this powerful and amazing opportunity to grow in grace through fully participating in the Mass and by humbly and worthily receiving Holy Communion.

The two disciples—Cleopas and his unnamed companion—felt their hearts burning within them as they listened to Jesus proclaim the message of the Scriptures, and while at table they recognized their Lord and Savior in the breaking of bread. Jesus was truly with them in a miraculous and life-giving way, and they responded by immediately returning to Jerusalem to share this Good News with others. This is an example for us to follow, and we can imitate it by silently praying each time we come to Mass: “Dear Lord, help me understand and accept whatever truth You wish to share with me today, help me to worship you wholeheartedly with all who are here in church with me, and help me receive You in Holy Communion with a truly humble and loving heart.” Jesus will be very pleased with such a prayer, and He will answer it in a way that truly helps prepare us for the glorious new life of His Kingdom.