

April 23, III SUNDAY OF EASTER

Our Scripture lessons for today have one common, encouraging theme: No matter what happens in our lives, the risen Jesus is always with us. God is always near to those who seek Him and want to live in His presence, doing His will.

The first reading, from Acts, taken from the beginning of Peter's first public proclamation about Jesus, tells us how God raised Jesus from death, thus fulfilling the Messianic prophecies about the promised descendant of David. The Refrain for today's Responsorial Psalm (Ps 16), has us singing, "Lord, You will show us the path of Life." In the second reading, Peter exhorts the early Christians to place their Faith and Hope in God Who has saved them through the precious Blood of His Son and Who has raised Jesus from the dead. The Emmaus incident described in today's Gospel shows us a God who will not abandon us when we are hurt and disappointed. The message of today's Scripture readings is that the followers of Jesus are to maintain contact with their Risen Lord through prayer, the Eucharist, and the Bible. The readings also remind us that our belief in Jesus' presence in the consecrated Bread and Wine should help us to understand better his presence in the Bible and in the believing and worshipping community.

Luke's Emmaus Gospel is a beautiful, theological dramatization of one of the encounters of the disciples with their risen Lord during those wonder-filled days after the discovery of the empty tomb. It is the story of how on Easter Sunday two disciples of Jesus, discouraged and devastated, set out on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus — a distance of about seven miles — and were overtaken by a stranger going along the same road. They began to speak to him about all that had occurred in the Holy City during the previous week. Most probably, Cleopas and his companion were residents of Emmaus and disciples of Jesus who had witnessed His crucifixion and burial.

The Jewish custom required that Cleopas and his companion invite Jesus to dinner. Hence, they invited Jesus for a night's rest in their house — and Jesus accepted the invitation. During the meal, when Jesus broke the bread and gave it to them, the disciples realized that this stranger was Jesus, the risen Christ, and Jesus immediately vanished. Later they said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us when he opened up the Scriptures to us?" Since they could not

keep the Good News to themselves, the Emmaus disciples immediately got up and walked back seven miles to Jerusalem to share their story with the other disciples. The Fathers of the Church note how well the details of this Emmaus episode match our process of coming to Faith in Jesus Christ. First, there are questions and a search for answers. Then comes a moment of discovery when our eyes are opened and our hearts within begin to burn with longing. Finally, there is the desire to tell the story to all who will listen.

1) Jesus meets us on our Emmaus Road. The risen Lord meets us on the road to our Emmaus, both in the ordinary experiences of our lives, and in the places to which we retreat when life is too much for us. We, too, have hopes and dreams about better health, healing, financial security and better family relationships. These often shatter. The story promises us, however, that Jesus will come to us in unfamiliar guises to support and strengthen us when we least expect the risen Lord. Emmaus moments come to us when we meet the risen Christ on our life's journey through rough times.

2) We meet Jesus on a daily basis in our life's journey. The Church instructs us to hear Jesus on a daily basis through prayer, through the faithful reading of, and meditation on, the Bible, through our experience of Jesus as we participate in the Eucharistic celebration in which the risen Lord gives us Himself as our spiritual Food and Drink, through our personal and family prayers, and through our family meals. When we meet Jesus in the Eucharist and through the Word of God, we commune with him in prayer, and thus renew our relationship of mutual loving service. These meetings enable us to encounter the risen Jesus living in all the people we meet and, in them, to offer our Lord humble, loving, selfless service.

3) Do our hearts burn when we listen to the risen Lord in the Bible? Christ comes to us most clearly in the Word. Vatican II (Dei Verbum 21) tells us that Jesus is to be equally venerated in the Eucharist and in the Bible. Therefore, we need to study the Bible, learn the Bible, pray with the Bible, memorize the Bible, meditate on the word of God with burning zeal, and practice what the Bible teaches.