

Homily for the Third Sunday of Easter, Year A

April 19, 2026

St. Bavo Parish

Rev. Peter J. Pacini, C.S.C.

First Reading: Acts 2:14, 22-33 (Death could not hold Jesus.)

Responsory: Psalm 16 (Lord, you will show us the path of life.)

Second Reading: 1 Peter 1:17-21 (You were ransomed by the precious blood of Christ.)

Gospel: Luke 24:13-35 (The encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus.)

Today's gospel is the famous story about the disciples on the road to Emmaus. St. Luke says that the two disciples on their seven-mile journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus were "conversing and debating" as they walked along. Their sad demeanor when Jesus approaches shows that they are devastated by the events of recent days. None of it makes sense to them. Jesus appeared to be a great prophet, maybe even the Messiah. They were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel. Yet, their chief priests and elders, who *should* know more about these things than they do, condemned Jesus and handed him over to be crucified. How could that be? Were they wrong to put their faith in Jesus, or were all of their religious leaders wrong about him? Neither seems possible.

The news of that morning raises even more questions for them. The tomb was found empty, but what does that mean? The women *claimed* to see a vision of angels, who announced that Jesus is alive, but who could believe such a thing? Several hours have passed, and no one has seen him. Did someone steal the body? Is this a sick prank to humiliate Jesus and his followers even more? The idea that Jesus has actually risen from the dead is almost impossible for them to fathom. And the notion that all of these events were *supposed to happen this way* never even enters their minds.

Jesus finally puts the pieces together for them by *opening their minds to the Scriptures*. After an exhaustive study of the Law and the Prophets, these two disciples understand, for the first time, that "it was *necessary* that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory." All of those terrible events of Holy Week, as well as the perplexing reports from Easter morning, make sense now. Jesus did not *fail* in his mission to redeem Israel; he *succeeded*. By dying on the cross, he actually *won*! The *first part* of the Paschal Mystery has now been revealed to them, namely, the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection. Christ voluntarily gave up his life for the salvation of all. This knowledge leaves the disciples' hearts absolutely burning within them!

But wait, there's more – much more! The *second part* of the Paschal Mystery still remains hidden from their sight, both literally and figuratively. They do not yet understand *how Jesus will be present* to his disciples now that he has risen from the dead. The answer to that question comes in the *breaking of bread*, a clear reference to the Eucharist. The Risen Jesus will be present to his Church *sacramentally*. In his final meal with his disciples, he left them a memorial by which they could remain in communion with him *always*. Whenever Christians celebrate this ritual meal, they will experience his real presence *among them* and *in them*. Before ascending to the Father, Jesus would also command his disciples to *baptize* believers,

uniting them to his death and promising them a share in his resurrection. With time, the Church would also develop five more sacraments, enabling the Risen Christ to touch his people in other ways: healing them of their sins, preparing them for the transition to eternal life, uniting them in matrimony, ordaining them for service to the Church, and confirming and strengthening the gifts of the Holy Spirit within them. Through all of these tangible and efficacious signs, the grace of Christ *continues* to touch the lives of his people, the faithful of the Church.

The sacraments, and especially the Eucharist, are powerful means of encountering the Risen Christ, but they are certainly not the *only* ways. I always end the Mass with the dismissal, "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life," as a reminder that Sunday Mass is the *beginning* of another week of grace. It is an encounter with the Lord, which leaves our hearts burning within us as we leave this sacred space and go out into the world to continue our "way" of discipleship throughout the week. While some people are able to attend weekday Mass, to re-ignite that fire each day, most people can't. They must look for other ways to keep their fire burning as they engage in the many activities that occupy their time and energy between those special, sacramental moments. Those efforts require discipline, initiative and a fair amount of creativity.

Daily prayer is essential for anyone who wants to keep his faith alive and well. But there are lots of different ways to pray. Each of us needs to find the types of prayer and the rhythms of prayer that work best for us. For example, structured forms of prayer like the Rosary help some people to feel comfortable and focused, while they cause others to become bored and distracted. Some people enter quite easily into silent meditation, while others can't get their minds to slow down and be still. Some people love to study and pray with Scripture, for it opens their mind and heart to God's Word, but others find themselves floundering, not understanding what they are reading. Some people who regularly pray *for others* find themselves growing in compassion each time they call to mind someone in need, but others who try the same form of prayer without seeing any obvious results can find themselves doubting whether their prayers are doing any good.

The key to *all* forms of personal prayer is the ability to *encounter Christ* in them. If we can experience Christ in the mysteries and the devotional rhythm of the Rosary, then it will feed our souls. If we can find Christ in silence, then the distractions can come and go without bothering us so much. If we can hear Christ speak to us through the Scriptures, then the Word will touch us, regardless of our level of understanding. If we can see Christ in the people for whom we pray, then we will stop judging our prayer only by the tangible results that we perceive.

Another way that all of us should seek to encounter Christ is through service to others. In fact, what distinguishes *Christian* service from other forms of humanitarian outreach is that the one engaging in Christian service is actively *looking for Christ* in others and expecting to meet him there. It is that dual motive of compassion and desire to meet the Lord that makes the service both prayerful and deeply meaningful.

All of us are disciples "on the way," just like those two heading for Emmaus. Christ finds all sorts of ways to draw near to us and reveal himself to us. Let us pray that we may have the *desire* to seek him and the eyes of faith to *recognize him*.