

3rd Sunday of Easter (Year A) – April 30, 2017

ACTS 2:14, 22-33; PS 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11; 1 PT 1:17-21; LK 24:13-35

Several years ago, a local Catholic organization sponsored a sacred music concert at the **Xavier College Prep Chapel**. The concert featured Gregorian chant and polyphonic music from the Catholic Mass sung by a group of vocal performance students from ASU. Our Cathedral Music Director *at that time* prepared these singers for the chant pieces since they were not taught to sing Gregorian chant at ASU.

At the end of the concert, Bishop Olmsted was invited to comment. I can't remember his exact words, so I'll *paraphrase* what he said. In essence, he pointed out that while the singing was, indeed, beautiful, and while the pieces they sang were, indeed, composed for the Mass, it was still a **concert**...and not a **Mass**. Had these same pieces been sung *during the actual celebration of the Mass*, he explained, they would not only have been beautiful; they would have also been “supercharged” with the Holy Spirit, giving them a supernatural power to penetrate heart and soul in a way that mere human talent could not achieve.

This was no merely pious platitude by the bishop, but a statement of fact. His comments **really** make sense when we recall what the Mass **really is**. Few, if any, have described the Mass more poignantly than **St. John Vianney**—the patron saint of priests—who said:

“All Good Works together are not of equal value with the sacrifice of the Mass, because they are the works of men, and the holy Mass is the work of God. Martyrdom is nothing in comparison; it is the sacrifice that man makes of his life to God; the Mass is the sacrifice that God makes to man of His Body and of His Blood.”

<http://catholicsaints.info/on-the-holy-sacrifice-of-the-mass-by-saint-john-vianney/>

In short, the Mass is something **Jesus does for us**—not the other way around. And what holds true for **music** also holds true for **Sacred Scripture**. As with genuinely *sacred* music composed for the Mass, the words of Scripture, **proclaimed during the Mass**, are enhanced by the supernatural power of God the Holy Spirit.

Many of us have had the experience while the **Readings** are proclaimed during the Liturgy of the Word at Mass, of feeling as though God is speaking to us **directly** and **personally** in these ancient words. That's no accident! It's the living Word of God

touching us personally. This happens even with parts of the Bible that we're read many times before in other contexts, but without the same noticeable effect. The Letter to the Hebrews says:

...the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Heb 4:12)

Sometimes, that deeper encounter with God's word is **further** facilitated through the **homily** which can illuminate obscure Scriptures in such a way that their meaning penetrates our **mind, heart** and **soul** more profoundly.

This is what **St. Peter** did for the people in the passage from **Acts of the Apostles** we just heard, though, in this case, it was probably **not** in the context of the Mass. He took a portion of **Psalm 16**—which also happens to be our **Responsorial Psalm** today—and, *through the lens of the Resurrection of Jesus*—made what had been obscure to the Jews for centuries, suddenly make sense.

The **Psalms** are considered to be largely the writings of **King David**. Jesus is a descendant of David, which is why he's referred to in the Gospels, on occasion, as the *Son of David*. But in Psalm 16, David speaks of God "*not abandoning his soul to the netherworld, nor suffering his holy one to see corruption*" (cf. Ps 16:10). For Jews, this would have been a difficult to reconcile because King David died and was buried in a tomb. So, how could he be preserved from **death** and **decay** if he...*died* and *decayed*?

But now, when we hear **Peter's** interpretation of **Psalm 16 in light of the Resurrection of Jesus**, we can now see how the words speak not of David himself, but rather, anticipate prophetically the Messiah who would die and rise from the dead. Here's what Peter said:

My brothers, one can confidently say to you about the patriarch David that he died and was buried, and his tomb is in our midst to this day. But since he was a prophet and knew that God had sworn an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, that neither was he abandoned to the netherworld nor did his flesh see corruption. God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses. (Acts 2:29-32)

When we turn, now, to the **Gospel** and see how Jesus interacted with the disciples on the **Road to Emmaus**, we gain a greater appreciation for how Jesus works—*through Scripture*—to draw his disciples—**then and now**—into a much more personal and impactful encounter that **then** sparks a desire to proclaim the Gospel to others.

Technically, Jesus was not celebrating the Mass with these two disciples, *at least at the point of the account where he met them on the road*. And yet, when we take a step back from this **entire** encounter, we can see it with new eyes.

But let's do this one step at a time.

First, Jesus met the two **where** they were and **how** they were: on the road; debating and arguing with one another; both distraught over what they perceived to be the failure of their Messiah, Jesus, to accomplish what had, only a short time before, looked so promising to them. At this point, they were **too wrapped up in their own concerns to recognize Jesus**.

After Jesus listened to what was in their hearts—just as he listens to us when we share our joys and our sorrow with him—he led them into a deeper understanding of the Living Word of God, gradually helping them recognize how the ancient writings of the **Hebrew Scriptures**—what we call the **Old Testament**—pointed, ultimately, to the very circumstances that these disciples found themselves in at that moment. The Gospel tells us:

Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. (Lk 24:27)

With their hearts now awakened by Jesus, they—quite understandably—did not want him to leave them. Now, let's see what happens:

As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. (Lk 24:28-29)

Let's recap.

Jesus lights their hearts on fire with a deeper understanding of *him* in the Scriptures. They disciples desire more of Jesus. They don't want him to go even though they still don't yet know that it's **Jesus himself** who's causing this reaction in their hearts.

He agrees to stay with them and, as they're sharing a meal, he does **four things** that he had done elsewhere, long before. Listen for the **four things** he does:

And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. (Lk 24:30-31)

He (1) took; (2) blessed; (3) broke; and (4) gave.

Let's look at **two other places** where he did this in the **New Testament**.

In **Luke's account** of the **feeding of the five thousand**, listen for those four things:

...taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. (Lk 9:16)

These same actions are also found in **St. Paul's** recounting of the Last Supper in his **1st Letter to the Corinthians**.

...the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (1 Cor 11:23-24)

The Feeding of the 5000 **foreshadowed** the Mass.

The Last Supper was the first Mass.

Now, listen to the words that will be proclaimed during the Eucharistic Prayer *at this Mass*:

On the day before he was to suffer, he took bread in his holy and venerable hands, and with eyes raised to heaven to you, O God, his almighty Father,

giving you thanks, he said the blessing, broke the bread and gave it to his disciples...

See the pattern here?

Now, as we know, there are **two major parts of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass**—the **Liturgy of the Word** and the **Liturgy of the Eucharist**. Hopefully, by now, we can see how the Living Word of God in the Sacred Scriptures of the Bible are essential in order for us to know **what**—or rather, *who*—we encounter in the **Holy Communion**.

If we think of Mass as just about “**getting Communion**”, we will be like the disciples **at the beginning of the encounter** on the **Road to Emmaus**, who, even though Jesus was in their presence, were too wrapped up in *their own preoccupations* to recognize him.

In our day, this is the person who **zones out** during the Readings, or who habitually **shows up late for Mass** and misses **some** or **all** of the Readings. If this person then receives Holy Communion without having been drawn more deeply into relationship with Jesus through the Scriptures, he or she remains largely unaffected by Jesus because, even though they **see** him—and even **receive** him—they don’t *know* him.

But it was precisely Jesus’ desire to reveal himself to these disciples *through the Sacred Scriptures*—to light their hearts on fire with love—that paved the way for them to “*recognize him in the breaking of the bread*” (cf. Lk 24:35). Remember their words, describing how they felt **before** their eyes were opened:

“Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32)

Jesus desired much more for the disciples on the road to Emmaus than they desired for themselves. When they wanted him to stay with them for an **evening**, he chose to stay with them *forever*, to touch them **deeply, profoundly** and **permanently** through the words of **Scripture**...and then to enter their souls in the **Holy Eucharist**.

When we open ourselves to such an encounter with Jesus—first in **Scripture** and then in **Holy Communion**—it will be **our** hearts, burning within **us**, which cry out to Jesus: **Stay with us. Always!**