

[Readings: Acts 2:14, 22-33; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35]

Back in March of 2008, almost ten years ago, I attended the first-ever reunion banquet of the Holy Name of Jesus Parish neighborhood, which was roughly the area bounded by Mt. Olivet Cemetery, Forest Lawn Cemetery, and Detroit City Airport. Our home was near McNichols and Van Dyke, on Mt. Olivet Street. I asked my dad when we moved there in 1959 if there was any significance that our neighborhood was bordered by two cemeteries, or that we lived on one of two streets named after a cemetery. He said, "It must be that there are a lot of deadbeats in the neighborhood!"

The gathering of Holy Name alumni was surreal, because many of the people I "re-united" with I had not seen since they or I were ten to fourteen years old. Now they were in the fifties with grandchildren. Those who were young parents in the 1960's were now retirees in their seventies and eighties.

The young priest, who gave me my First Holy Communion during his first assignment after ordination, is now 83. Parishioners here have told me that when THEY go to reunions, they can't get over how much older their classmates look than they do. Of course, you and I don't age, just them, right?

Our three readings today speak of mystical, surreal, almost dream-like experiences. Look at our First Reading. Is this the same Peter the Apostle, speaking boldly now in front of God and everybody? Isn't this the guy who denied Jesus three times, and hid like a sniveling coward with the other apostles in the Upper Room on that "first night of the week?" Listen to him speaking with conviction, with strength, with bravery. What happened to him? Pentecost! The Holy Spirit happened to him!

His words in today's Second Reading are more subdued, but equally authoritative and courageous. He – or his companions -- must be coming to the end of their earthly life, and the end of their earthly ministry. He sounds almost wistful as he tells us how to live our lives during this time of "sojourn."

"Sojourn" is an interesting word. And I'll bet St. Peter chose it deliberately. It means that we're not going to be here forever. It means that there is another destination ahead of us. It means that we are just guests here while we live and breathe on this good earth. It means that our stay here is temporary.

So, does that change our approach to life? It should! You and I are like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. They were engaged in a lively discussion about the past three days. THE Three Days: Holy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday over to Easter Sunday. The FIRST time around! In the course of their lively discussion, Jesus shows up and walks with them. At first, He is seen as a stranger.

What follows in the following chapters gives no doubt that Jesus not only "appeared to appear" but that He DID appear to them and He DOES to us!

Note that they were going AWAY from the danger of Jerusalem to the safety and security of their home. Note, too that Emmaus is described as being "seven miles away." The actual town of Emmaus is really eleven or twelve miles away from Jerusalem, but Luke uses the perfect Biblical number to make a point: Jesus meets us at the perfect time and at the perfect place, right where we are supposed to meet Him.

And if it seems that Jesus wants to keep going, we don't let Him. We invite Him in. We invite Him into our hearts. "The sun is going down, Lord, it is almost night. It's soon going to be that time when robbers and vandals and murderers claim the road. Be with us, stay with us, keep us safe with You to protect us." And Jesus agrees. He enters. Jesus does not push Himself onto us. Jesus always waits for our invitation.

The Easter faith of the two travelers to Emmaus doesn't result from examining an empty tomb. It comes from meeting Jesus Christ on the way, from hearing Him speak and interpret His Holy Word to them, and from His sharing a meal with them. Here we find the echoes of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' miraculous feedings of the multitudes and His giving of Himself to the Apostles at the Last Supper.

And when the two disciples have an "aha" moment, they recognize that Jesus HAS risen from the dead. The Jesus they knew before Sunday disappears. That is why He vanishes. His physical, earthly presence is no longer needed. The faith of the disciples is rekindled to the point of giving them spiritual heartburn! They forsake the danger of the night to run on the road and tell the other disciples in Jerusalem what they have witnessed. It cannot wait until morning. It must be proclaimed, it must be shouted in the dangerous darkness.

Here we see what Jesus does for us, here and now, in this Eucharistic celebration. As Jesus broke open the Word to His disciples, we have the Word of God

explained to us during this Liturgy of the Word. As Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the disciples, so He does for us today and every time we gather in His name in this Most Holy Eucharist. This is how YOU and I come to Easter faith!

At that Holy Name reunion, we didn't have the convenience of "before" photos on our name tags, which kept falling off anyway. But I had a couple dozen of those "aha" moments, when I didn't recognize the person standing in front of me until I saw their name on their name tags. Then, hugs and handshakes all around!

So it must have been for Jesus after His Resurrection. I knew very few people would remember me or recognize me because I was not part of the popular crowd growing up in Holy Name Parish. The Roman collar turned a few heads, and then there was ultimately the recognition that I was not just "David's or Pat's or Kathy's brother" or "Ray and Rose Marie's Son." But I was "Nick."

For Jesus, it was not his re-appearance as the defeated prophet or the pretend Messiah. This is the Risen Lord, glorified and barely recognizable by those who knew Him best and who loved Him the most. How could His disciples have missed recognizing Him? More importantly, why do WE miss it?

The disciples make up for it. They head back to Jerusalem. They forsake the dangerous dark of night. They can't wait. They were slow to "get it" on the road to Emmaus. Now they are racing to tell the others what they saw, what they learned, and what they felt. We are the modern, joy-filled disciples, called to strive, to celebrate and to serve. Jesus once again explains the Scriptures to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. He breaks bread and reveals Himself to them. He loves them right until the very end of HIS sojourn. And He loves us to the end of ours. ALLELUIA! AMEN!