

[Readings: Is.50:4-7; Psalm 22; Phil. 2:6-11; Matt. 26:14-27:66]

Consider with me the shifting sentiments of the crowd in the Gospel accounts of Holy Week. On Sunday, we'll hear the people of Jerusalem praising Jesus: "Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David!" Yet, just a few days later on Good Friday, that same crowd will be shouting, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Jesus knew the human capacity each one of us has to choose or not to fully choose to have God in our lives. We call this concupiscence. St. Paul puts it this way, "I do not do what I should, but I do what I hate" (Rom. 7:15). We are prone to turning our backs on God, otherwise known as committing sin.

"More tortuous than anything is the human heart, beyond remedy; who can understand it?" asks the prophet Jeremiah. But that is not the end of the passage: "I, the LORD, explore the mind and test the heart, giving to all according to the fruit of their deeds." (Jer. 17: 9-10)

The Lord knows our hearts. Jesus came into this world, taking on our human nature, sharing in the tortuous experience of having a human heart.

Jesus saved – and saves -- our human hearts.

This is at the very heart of the sacred mysteries we enter into this Holy Week – and at every Mass. Jesus isn't afraid of the mess in our human hearts. He goes to the depths of our mess so that we can be free to love and to be loved by Him. Won't you accompany Him this week as He enters Jerusalem?

As He ordains His priests, as He gives us His very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity? As His prayerful sweat turns to blood? As He sits alone and abandoned in a jail cell – all this on Holy Thursday evening? As He empties Himself for us in His condemnation, on the Way of the Cross and His Crucifixion and His shameful death on Good Friday? As He sleeps in the tomb on Holy Saturday and then is raised up in Glory on Easter? It's all here for you this week!

God can forgive every sin and bridge every distance. "Father, forgive them they know not what they do." With Jesus, things are never over, and it is never too late. We can always come back to new and eternal life. Let us journey together this week, with courage, toward Jerusalem and toward Easter. AMEN!

[Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 12:1-15]

Before entering the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D. C., visitors pass by a prominent sign that reads, "Think about what you saw." Far from merely being a catchy slogan, the sign is a call to action. "Think about what you saw" calls visitors to remember the past and let it shape the future. In that way, the Holocaust Museum remains a LIVING memorial, a means to preserve the memory of the victims, while calling this and future generations out of passivity and into action.

Tonight's First Reading gives us all the essentials of the Passover or Seder Meal. Among the many striking features of the Seder are two. The first is the "NOW" of the Passover Meal. Orthodox Jews do not simply remember what happened in the past. Speaking the words of what happened in the past makes the action real in the PRESENT. They are not merely remembering the Passover -- they ARE doing the Passover right now!

The words of their prayers speak of this: "Let all who ARE hungry come and eat. Let all who ARE in need come and celebrate Passover... This year we ARE slaves: next year we are free!" Secondly, the dismissal at the end of the Passover meal ends with the well-known words: "Next year in Jerusalem!" It speaks of the hope that one day all will return to the mother land -- or better put -- the Holy Land. Some think this will happen at Armageddon. We believe otherwise. When the Church is united at last, all will be "in Jerusalem."

Tonight, we gather to celebrate the Supper of the Lord, a living memorial that puts us smack dab into the present moment of our lives. Like our Jewish ancestors, we simply do not remember and retell the story: In speaking the words, we are in the PRESENT MOMENT of the REAL PRESENCE: "This IS my Body... This IS my blood." "Do this (NOW) in remembrance of Me."

As Moses received his instructions from his God, we receive our instructions, and our shipping out orders from Jesus Christ Himself. Those orders come from the words found in tonight's Gospel: "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should do also."

Jesus, John tells us, knew that His hour had come to pass from this world to the Father. He loved His own in the world and He loved them to the end. He was fully aware of what was going to happen in the next twenty-four hours. He sheds the signs of prestige and position in society, and washes the feet of His disciples. Are you aware, my friends, that you are in this awesome mystery NOW? From the moment you walked into this holy place and sat yourself within these hallowed walls, you put yourselves into the middle of this holy mess!

You come to the Supper of the Lord with tired eyes and weary bodies. You come with your genuine concerns and cares about work, or the lack of it; health, or the lack of it; love, or the lack of it. You come to the table of the Supper of the Lord, in Word and in Sacrament, to be inspired, to be given hope, to be nourished. And then, like our pilgrim ancestors in Egypt, you are ready to leave this place at a moment's notice.

And where are you headed? When you receive the Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, you receive it not from me, but from Him in Whose place I stand as an "Alter Christus" -- "Another Christ." As Jesus handed a morsel of bread to Judas Iscariot, who turned traitor, and to Peter, who denied Him, and to the other ten seated around Him, Jesus Christ hands you His very Self for your nourishment and strength. For your peace. For your salvation.

Think about what you saw. Think about what you see here tonight. Let that guide you to where you are headed. To betrayal and to denial, or to fraternal love, ministry and service. After tonight's Mass, Adoration and Night Prayer, let us leave here tonight, fully aware of what is going to happen to us, or totally without a clue, letting Jesus Christ guide us to wash some feet. The feet of those who have lost their homes and jobs. The feet of those who are mentally or physically challenged. To wash the feet of those who are broken and broken-hearted, or who are strangers and aliens in our land.

This, we will learn, is the ultimate meaning of the Eucharist. To become the hands and feet, the eyes and the ears, the mouth and the heart of the Lord in the world. AMEN!

[Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 31; Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9; John 18:1-19:42]

Where was Mary during Holy Week? Not only was she there, she was best able to understand what was happening.

Not only was she there, watching it all, but her Immaculate Conception means that she — alone among everyone in history — had a pure understanding of the passion, death, and resurrection of her son.

On Holy Thursday, when Jesus gave us his body, Mary knew just what that meant.

Since Mary lived with St. John the Evangelist, you can hear Mary over John's shoulder — or, better, on his mind — in the words of John's Gospel. John doesn't describe the Last Supper but his sixth chapter comments on it. So, on Holy Thursday we hear, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And St. John tells us what that meant: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

The oddness of expecting someone's flesh to nourish another is not odd to a mother who carried a child in the womb and then nursed him at her breast. As St. John Henry Newman put it, "He took his flesh and his blood ... from the flesh, from the veins of Mary."

On Holy Thursday I want to receive him the way he received her.

On Good Friday at noon, Mary was transformed — and she knew it.

The death of Jesus on the cross must have been a more powerful experience for Mary than for anyone else.

As Pope Pius IX proclaimed in 1854: "The most Blessed Virgin Mary was, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of almighty God and by virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, preserved immune from all stain of original sin."

That means where we see the cause of our future salvation on Good Friday, she sees the reason for her original grace. More than that — where we see the cause of our obedience; she sees the fruit of her obedience.

As St. Irenaeus says, “Being obedient, she became the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race.”

It’s a strange interplay between her Yes and her Son’s. “The everyday obedience of Jesus to Joseph and Mary both announced and anticipated the obedience of” the Agony in the Garden, says the Catechism. And His public ministry, which began in obedience to his Mother at Cana, ends in obedience to his Father at Calvary.

As I venerate the cross, I want to join my Yes to hers, and to His.

On Good Friday at 3:00 PM, when Jesus was laid in her lap, Mary held him — again. Jesus spent his life restlessly serving his people, and said, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” He did lay his head in one place, though — the lap of his mother. As she held Him at the foot of the cross, she must have remembered when she held Him as an infant, grateful that He could sleep at last.

On Good Friday, at the Pietà — or at the Madonna and Child — I’ll ask to rest there also, since He himself said to me and to us: “Behold your Mother!”

Finally, on Holy Saturday, when the apostles were giving up on Jesus, Mary was conquering with Him.

The Apostles’ Creed tells us what happened on Holy Saturday: “He descended into hell.” An ancient Christian homily imagines what that was like: “He goes to free the prisoner Adam and his fellow-prisoner Eve from their pains, He who is God, and Adam’s son,” it says. The New Adam went to rescue the Old Adam; and that means the Old Eve was freed by the New Eve — “Death through Eve, life through Mary,” as St. Jerome put it.

We forget that Mary is not simply the downcast Lady of pious statues — she is also “fair as the moon, bright as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners.” She is a fierce queen, fierce as any mother whose children are being threatened. So I want to wait with Mary on Holy Saturday for her victory to come on Easter morning.

Here is a story of Radical Forgiveness.

On May 31, 1999, Rachel Muha experienced a mother's worst nightmare. Her youngest son, Brian, and his friend Aaron Land were taken by force on a journey of about 20 miles, spanning three states, that ended in torture and death. They were roommates and students at Franciscan University of Steubenville, and the murders shocked the campus and the wider community.

Even before her son's body was found, Rachel publicly forgave her son's killers. It was a life-changing moment, not just for her but for everyone who heard her powerful act of forgiveness and love. Rachel has continued to choose mercy and forgiveness every day since then, now leading a ministry that serves inner-city children in the hope that they won't choose the same life that Brian's murderers did.

[Legacy of Mercy](#) tells the story of raising and losing a son; the story of forgiving his murderers; and the story of a mother responding to her son's death not with vengeance or self-pity, but with love and a desire to serve others in need. "Legacy of Mercy is a powerful work. Author Gretchen Crowe has crafted a book which is a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the wonderful gift of forgiveness. I believe this book will soften hearts and change lives for the better."

How can we make sense of suffering? Christians know the life of a disciple will not be easy. Christ did not mince words about this — telling His disciples they must take on life's sufferings as in the form of capital punishment that would later be used to take his life: "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Lk 9:23).

How do Christians make sense of the crosses they bear? The question of why suffering exists finds its answer in Christ's transformation of suffering through love. Christ's cross makes sense of our own, hence the universal appeal of popular devotions like the Stations of the Cross.

The universal reality of suffering makes devotions inspiring meditation on the passion and death of Jesus particularly relevant in Christian life. Such prayer forms like the Stations of the Cross are popular in the season of Lent. They have

become a primary opportunity for the faithful to learn the purpose of their crosses.

It makes sense, then, that those who have “put on Christ,” becoming members of his body through baptism -- a bond renewed and strengthened in each reception of holy Communion -- should expect nothing less than a share in Christ’s own passion and cross. In light of Christ’s passion, it likewise makes sense to understand suffering’s purpose as rooted in love. “If you really want to love Jesus,” St. Gemma Galgani said, “first learn to suffer, because suffering teaches you to love.”

Christ’s own suffering and death has untold value and immense purpose – through which God bought us back from the slavery of sin and death. So, too, does ours, because, as St. John Paul II described it, “everyone, in their suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ” (*Salvifici Doloris*, No. 19). The Stations of the Cross make real every imaginable aspect of human suffering that was on full display at Christ’s passion. And they teach us to see the fruit of suffering.

In meditating on Christ’s passion and death, comes the realization that life’s sufferings can be joined to Christ’s -- by which one learns that love forms suffering’s foundation. “The road is narrow,” St. John of the Cross said. “He who wishes to travel it more easily must cast off all things and use the cross as his cane. In other words, he must be truly resolved to suffer willingly for the love of God in all things.” The cane I use when I walk is my personal reminder of the Cross.

We adore You, O Christ, and we bless You, because by Your Holy Cross, You have redeemed the world. AMEN!

[Readings: Gn 1:1-2:2; Ex 14:15-15:1, Is 54:5-14; Rom 6:3-1; Lk: 24:1-12]

Last Thursday evening, we concluded our forty-day journey through Lent. If we were faithful to the discipline of Lent, we are probably a little thinner, a little poorer in the wallet, and a little richer in spirit. As we journeyed through this Holy Week, we were reminded of our connection to that first Holy Week. Tonight we stand at the empty tomb, like a butterfly getting ready to emerge from its cocoon.

We heard the stories of struggle and obstacles. The struggle of creation breaking forth out of nothing; the struggle of an enslaved people given their freedom; the struggle of those who are thirsty for fulfillment and who come to the Lord in their poverty. The struggle of God's Word being sent down from the heavens and not returning until it has achieved its purpose. The struggle of Jesus Himself through the death of sin and decay to the life of Resurrection.

Between Good Friday and tonight, the Church has waited at the Lord's tomb. It has been a time of tension between two worlds – between the realm of death and the realm of life.

The Easter Vigil liturgy was restored in 1955. Back then, it was celebrated on the morning of Holy Saturday, not the evening. That is why freshly-blessed holy water and the blessing of Easter baskets took place in the early afternoon of Holy Saturday – fresh after the conclusion of the Easter Vigil. Now that the Vigil is at night, some parishes actually experimented with waiting until the Easter Masses to bless the food baskets. That ended in disaster, as the foot traffic in the full churches trampled over the Easter baskets. It was not a pretty sight!

If we are honest, our ultimate fear is death. Millions of people view death with terror. We are all certain that we will die. The day, time or hour nobody knows. But it will come for us all.

Tonight, we stare down death, and it is death that blinks. We sing our ancient Exulted, from the time of St. Ambrose in the fourth century, proclaiming the death of death itself:

“Rejoice, O earth, in shining splendor, Radiant in the brightness of your King!”

Pandemics may come, and world's powerful politicians will threaten as they always have. But all is fleeting. Christ is risen! Death is only an interlude. Death has no more hold over us.

On this night of nights, we dare to call sin itself, "O Happy Fault!"

"Christ has conquered, glory fills you! Darkness vanishes forever!"

"May this holy building shake with joy!"

If we are willing to face our fears -- sometimes with the help of an angel -- we can break the shackles of the fears that enslave us and discover a newness in our lives. We might be struggling to find our new selves in Christ, but only with a little "window of opportunity" to help us.

Or, God bless us, we might be that fully-emerging new creation we celebrate tonight. Our "old selves" buried in the waters of baptism and our "new selves" emerging healthy, whole and holy! What a grace that would be!

My friends, Easter is a time of possibilities. In his rising from the dead, Christ enables us to make possible in our own lives all that he taught and lived throughout his brief life among us. The empty tomb is a sign of perfect hope -- that in Christ, all things are possible. Our story and our lives do not end at the grave, sealed in a tomb blackened by darkness and sin. Our story and our lives continue. We become the angels -- the messengers -- of the Resurrection in every act of kindness, compassion and forgiveness extended to us and which we, in turn, extend to others.

It is all here -- the promises of God and the legacy of hope even as we live in a world often seemingly without hope. So many stories. So many flourishes of promise. So many anxious hearts waiting to hear Good News.

Walk out of your cave, stretch out your tired and weakened spiritual muscles and take a deep breath of fresh Holy Spirit air. There IS reason to hope! THAT is worth celebrating and calling it Resurrection Sunday. "Tell us, what did you see?" "Let me tell you!" AMEN! ALLELUIA!

[Readings: VIGIL: Gn 1:1-2:2; Ex 14:15-15:1, Is 54:5-14; Rom 6:3-1; Lk: 24:1-12; EASTER SUNDAY: [Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Psalm 118; Col 3:1-48; John 20:1-9]

Did you know that in the Gospels, there are at least 12 accounts of the Risen Jesus being seen by others? The appearances happen several times on Easter Sunday – in the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening. To Mary Magdalene, to the women at the tomb via angels, and to the eleven remaining Apostles, to whom Jesus arrives a week later. Over the next 40 days, Jesus will appear to as many as 500 disciples before ascending to the Father and returning to Heaven.

Do YOU have a favorite Easter account? Mine is the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. On Easter morning, two disciples are traveling on the road to Emmaus. Leaving Jerusalem, they are downcast and disappointed over what had happened to Jesus. They do not understand the stories of the women who said that they had seen him early that morning. As the disciples are walking away from the holy city, “in the course of their lively discussion,” Jesus appears and walks alongside them.

Have you even been involved in a lively discussion, so loving and impassioned, that you felt the presence of the Lord, of the Holy Spirit? That happens to me when I visit with my closest friends.

As in the other Resurrection appearances, the disciples do not recognize Jesus. And, as in the other appearances, Jesus does not reveal Himself immediately. Instead, He walks with these two disciples and engages them in conversation. They express their frustration and sorrow over the events of Good Friday. Jesus listens patiently, but instead of nodding in an understanding way, He turns their sorrow on its head — to their shock and our Jesus wants to do the same for you and me. Bring YOUR history, YOUR struggles and YOUR pain to Him. Jesus, citing the Hebrew Scriptures, explains that it was actually necessary that the Messiah would undergo the suffering of the Passion and crucifixion.

They were predicted, and everything that happened to Jesus was there, albeit hidden from the disciples’ understanding.

As they reach their home, the disciples invite Jesus to stay with them and to break bread with them. And when He does, their eyes are opened. They recognized the Risen Jesus and He disappears from their sight. Their hearts burn once again as Jesus disappears from their sight. They immediately return to Jerusalem to tell the Good News. The tomb is empty. Jesus is Risen. Alleluia!

Whenever we come together to break bread in the Lord's name, we imitate those disciples who participated with the Lord in the Second celebration the Eucharist, preceded by reflection on the Word of God.

You and I stand before the empty tomb every Easter. To stand in that dark, cold place, to think of Him lying there totally alone, His soul visiting the souls of all who have died and are awaiting salvation.

We have all been in our tombs, facing our own dark nights of the soul, feeling unloved or unwanted or misunderstood, alone without any consolation from God or others. The Good News that we celebrated and proclaimed on Good Friday is the astonishing truth that the Lord went into the pit before us, tasted a profound abandonment impossible to understand, and embraced a horrifying death. He did all of this so that we would never lose hope, even in the darkest of nights. Easter Sunday is Jesus' victory over the forces of sin and death, the vindication of His entire mission, the triumph of love over hate, grace over evil, communion over loneliness and eternal life over the power of darkness.

The Resurrection of Christ does not magically erase the wounds and limitations of our frail humanity.

We will still feel misunderstood, suffer terrible heartbreaks and ultimately face death alone, but the Lord has opened a path for us; light shines at the end of the tunnel. Jesus wants us to call on His mighty power, to enjoy the intimacy of His presence through the Sacraments, to hear His gentle voice in the Word and to discover the beauty of His face in those around us.

Want to get "back to the basics" of our Faith? Enjoy the book, "A Minute in the Church, Back to the Basics," the fifth volume written by Gus Lloyd, a respected Catholic writer and host of "Seize the Day" on Catholic Radio. We give it to you as our Easter present from St. Martin de Porres Parish. Enjoy!

Today, about three in ten U.S. adults identify as religious “nones.” It’s one of the nation’s fastest-growing religious affiliations. This means, for most Catholics, the mission field is not a destination, it’s right in their homes, dorm rooms or workplace. The conversations are happening at the dinner table, in the car, in the cafeteria. They’re happening at birthday parties and during holiday gatherings. And while for many, the thought of evangelizing a stranger makes them anxious, the reality of evangelizing to those you know and love well can be downright distressing.

Here are some helpful hints we can use like Jesus, when He evangelized the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus.

**Prayer.** Pray for the ability to speak truth in love. Pray for them. First speak to Christ about others. He will take care of the rest!

**Model the Faith.** Your words and actions speak volumes. The ability for Christians to persuade non-believers is directly proportional to their godly lives.

**Meet people where they are.** Start there, and move forward and deeper.

**Walk in their shoes.** Acknowledge their struggles and their pain. And ours.

We might still find ourselves in the tomb, but when our eyes get used to the darkness, we will see that Jesus is there with us, offering consolation, mercy and hope. We don’t have to wait until we are dead to know the glory of God and taste the joy of Easter. Just as in the Gospels, the Risen Lord shows up in the most unexpected places, wearing the most shocking of disguises, if we have the eyes to see and the heart to hear. How is the Risen Lord acting and speaking in your life? When Jesus tenderly calls our name in prayer, when we see His wounds in the suffering of others, when we receive the fullness of the Eucharist.

May your hearts pulsate with the power and life of the Lord, crucified and risen, walking with each of us on our own road to Emmaus. AMEN! ALLELUIA!

[Readings: Acts 2:42-47; 5:12-16; Ps. 118; 1 Peter 1:3-9; John 20:19-31]

*(Parts of this homily are taken from a reflection by Gretchen R. Crowe, editorial director for periodicals at OSV.)*

It's been four years since we first heard about the COVID-19 pandemic. With all the health procedures put into place in our Archdiocese, in our country and in our world, "out of an over-abundance of caution," the first question I heard the most was, "When will we get back to normal?"

It's the question that we all still seem to be thinking, saying, praying these days. Even with Lent behind us, the pall of sacrifice can't help but continue to hang over our heads and our hearts.

Each of us probably has a "back to normal" list. Back to Mass, certainly. But half of our people still haven't come back to church. This hurts our congregation, our army of parish volunteers, and yes, our Sunday collections. Back with our extended family. But there are still family differences on how we are handling the aftermath of the pandemic. Maybe a trip back to a favorite restaurant or a night out back at the movies. But businesses are still having a hard time getting and keeping workers.

We are longing to return to what once was. We are aching for the familiar, the planned, and the ordered. We are waiting to hit "play" on our "paused" lives, to pick things back up from where we left off.

But it has struck me throughout all of this, as it's no doubt struck many of you, that maybe the Lord was telling us through this strange time of global post-pandemic that what, for many of us, has become "normal" isn't good enough anymore.

The Lord might be telling us: “Slow down; those things don’t matter; your priorities are all mixed up. I made you for more than your normal.” And he did. He made us to love Him and to be with Him forever in heaven.

He sent His son to earth to show us a new normal — a new way of living: “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Mt 10:39). In the busyness of our self-made “normals,” we forget that our every word and deed should not be centered around OUR wants and desires, but on those of Jesus.

And His desire is for us to follow Him, to love Him and to strive with all our might to be with him in heaven. This began for the Apostles in the Upper Room on Easter night.

Things are not normal in today’s Gospel. The Apostles are huddled in the Upper Room two days after the execution of their Lord and Teacher. No, it was not normal in the Upper Room. Nor was it normal when their Lord and Teacher, last seen dead and buried, makes His walks through a locked and solid door. His message is not one of disappointment or vengeance. Jesus will not talk down to them and judge them. Instead, He greets them with words of peace. He breathes on them the Holy Spirit. He forgives them and gives them the power to forgive others.

Today’s Feast day, known as Divine Mercy Sunday, was established in the Holy Year 2000 by Pope St. John Paul II. The inspiration for Divine Mercy Sunday can be found in the diaries of St. Faustina Kowalska, a Polish nun who experienced apparitions of Jesus in the 1930’s and recorded his messages. “My daughter,” Jesus told her, “say that I am love and mercy personified.” Jesus continues:

“Speak to the world about My mercy; let all mankind recognize My mercy. It is a sign for the end times; after it will come the day of justice.

While there is still time, let them have recourse to the fount of My mercy; let them profit from the Blood and Water which gushed forth for them.”

During the canonization of St. Faustina on April 30, 2000, Pope John Paul II proclaimed that the first Sunday after Easter “will be called ‘Divine Mercy Sunday.’” Five years later, on the vigil of Divine Mercy Sunday in 2005, Pope John Paul II died. He was beatified on Divine Mercy Sunday in 2011 by Pope Benedict XVI. On Divine Mercy Sunday in 2014, Pope Francis canonized Pope John Paul II, along with Pope John XXIII. All of us are invited TODAY to St. Faustina Parish, located on 12 Mile Road between Schoenherr and Hayes Roads for Divine Mercy Sunday.

Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament will begin at 12 Noon with silent prayer. The Divine Mercy Novena will be prayed at 1:00 PM, with the opportunity for the Sacrament of Confession also starting at 1:00 PM. The Divine Mercy Mass will begin at 2:00 PM presided by our Northeast Region Auxiliary Bishop Robert Fisher. Join us!

Consider how reassuring are the words of the First Letter of Peter today: new birth into a living hope, an imperishable inheritance kept in heaven, and protection by the power of God. All it takes is faith—faith in the one who though you have not “seen” him, you believe in and love him nonetheless. “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”

No, it was not normal in the Upper Room. And it cannot be “normal” in our lives anymore. We may have to suffer through various trials to prove our genuine faith. With St. Faustina, we proclaim with confidence: “Jesus, I trust in You!” AMEN! ALLELUIA!

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

Back in March of 2008, fifteen 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. (The street to the south of us is Forest Lawn). 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. One of those neighbors worships with us here at St. Martin de Porres. She is 93 years old!

The young priest, who gave me my First Holy Communion during his first assignment after ordination, died this year at the age of 90. 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." 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! "Were not our hearts burning within us?"

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. So it must be for us.

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. In fact, my family was the butt of jokes and bullying. The Roman collar I was wearing 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?

Who has helped you to know Jesus? Who or what has helped you believe? When and how did you encounter the Lord? Where are opportunities in your life to invite other people to encounter Jesus? What prevents you from doing so?

In what parts of your life can you invite Jesus to "stay with" you?

For 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.

And so we pray:

### **Emmaus Prayer**

Lord, as we walk down the journey of life,  
we ask that you would be our constant companion,  
especially on those days when we are disheartened or when we have  
strayed off of your path.

When we are downcast, we ask that you lift our spirits.

When we are confused, we ask that you enlighten our minds.

When we are disappointed, we ask that you give us hope.

You, Lord, have blessed us with your Gospel.

Open our minds and hearts to receive your word and send your Holy  
Spirit to give us understanding.

May your teaching take root in our lives and guide us in your ways.

While we have faith in you, Lord, we also have our moments of doubt.

We ask that you deepen our faith, so that rededicated to you,  
we would give bolder witness, and freely and gladly give generous  
service.

You gently ask us to invite you into our hearts and homes.

With a spirit of welcome and humility, we invite you to dwell with us  
always.

We offer our praise and thanks for the many ways that you feed us  
and provide for our many needs.

Keep us closely connected to our brothers and sisters in faith.

Help us to see others with the eyes of love.

Fill us with your compassion.

May we work tirelessly to foster relationships in our community built  
on the foundations of truth, mutual respect, cooperation, and trust.

AMEN! ALLELUIA!