

[Readings: Exodus 20:1-17; Psalm 19; 1 Cor 1:22-25; John 2:13-25]

Almost every one of us has gone through a time in our lives of rebellion – rebellion against parents, against teachers, against bosses, against popes and bishops – even against pastors! -- against rules and regulations, and rebellion against almost all authority.

I grew up in the 1960's with the motto: "Never trust anyone over 30!"

Also in our lifetime, we have had people take the Ten Commandments apart, calling them irrelevant, outdated or just plain silly. But these Ten Commandments, the Great Commandment (love God, neighbor and self) and the Beatitudes (Blessed will you be if you do this) are the highway signs God has given us for our life's journey. Since we make this earthly journey only once, these signs save us personally, and the human family, a great deal of misery, harm and time. We have learned their value at great personal expense, usually by NOT following them and then suffering the painful consequences.

The Ten Commandments, which we were reminded about in today's First Reading, can better be described as short instructions for life. As someone put the meaning of the letters of the word "Bible," they said, "Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth." They teach us what is necessary for living a truly full life. They are nothing more and nothing less than God's will for us human beings.

That is why Psalm 95 says that "the commands of the Lord are true." "Lord, you have the words of everlasting life!" They are true because they correspond to what we truly are. They are a shortcut to wisdom that we could not acquire on our own, by ourselves.

The reason that Jesus has the power to know the human heart is because of who He is. Jesus comes from God; He remains one with God; He has the power to know us. But Jesus is also fully human. He is able to speak the language of humanity. He knows what it means to love, to want, to suffer, to lose, to fear, to hate, and to want to run away from it all.

Jesus understands what it means to be misunderstood; He has known denial, betrayal and rejection. He knows how it feels to be disappointed and abandoned by those He thought were His friends. Jesus knows the pain of bending His will and surrendering His life to a suffering that none of us would have chosen for ourselves.

Paul's listeners in Palestine and Greece call this kind of thinking a stumbling block and utter foolishness. But John puts this temple story at the beginning of His Gospel rather than near the end as the other three Gospels do, to prove a point.

Something very new and very different is happening here. Something which calls for a new understanding of law and spirit and love and action.

Lent challenges us to cast out the money changers who shortchange our time and attention, to drive out the useless, the meaningless and the destructive things that desecrate the sacred places within us where God wishes to dwell. Let us present ourselves today as wise, new dwelling places for God. AMEN!

[Readings: 2 Chron.36:14-16; Ps. 137; Eph. 2:4-10; Jn. 3:14-21]

It's good to remember where we came from, and what we did during the journey from the past to the present. The Chronicler of today's First Reading summarizes all of salvation history – the events and the works of God in the human family from the beginning of time to the end of the Jewish era – and there are common themes that emerge. Sinfulness and darkness, redemption and hope. There is cause for the light of joy in the midst of our Lenten darkness.

St. Paul alludes to this in today's Second Reading by speaking of any good that has come to us human beings as pure grace, pure gift. God is rich in mercy, because of the great love He had – and has – for us! Even if and when we are knee-deep or neck-deep in sin and darkness, God continues to call us to turn away from our sins and return to the holy presence of God Himself.

In the Gospel conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, it is once again dark. St. John uses the image of light and darkness often in his Gospel, and today's reading is no exception. Nicodemus is an important man in town. He could have sent someone to ask the questions that Nicodemus bears in his heart. Instead, being wary of approaching Jesus in the daytime, Nicodemus waits until it is dark to draw near to this controversial and complex man.

Nicodemus had just asked Jesus how someone can be “born again.” How can you go back to being a baby and retreating inside your mother's womb and then come out again?

Jesus replies to Nicodemus, “If you keep taking my Word literally all the time, you will not understand.” Then Jesus says: “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.” What is this “snake” that Jesus is talking about? Remember that when the Jews were wandering in the desert, they kept complaining about how much easier they had it when they were slaves in Egypt. They had to work hard, they had no freedom, but they had a home and a meal to go home to every night, and a bed to retreat to at the end of the day.

And because of that grumbling, God sends seraph serpents to

bite them and kill some of them. It wasn't until Moses fashions a serpent on a stick and raises it up that those who were dead or dying are raised up and healed. The pole was vertical. The snake was stretched out horizontally. Sound familiar? It's in the shape of and is a precursor to the Cross of Christ.

The same image of a coiled snake on a pole is used in the logo of the American Medical Association. Except, it has a set of wings on top of it. And today, the grumbling crowds in the desert are replaced by full waiting rooms of grumbling people called patients! I find it ironic that the word "patient," which implies that people are expected to be "patient" on their way to wellness, can rarely be found in these days of high medical expenses and frustrations in the healing process! It takes patience to be a patient!

The words "raise up," used at least seven times in John's Gospel, can also mean "glorified" or "exalted." That's what will happen when Jesus suffers the humiliating and unbelievably painful crucifixion on Good Friday. Because He was "glorified" and exalted" on that most Holy Cross, Jesus will be "raised up," "glorified" and "exalted" in his Resurrection – in His rising from the dead.

All three of today's readings speak of the pathetic situation that we choose to keep ourselves in. We still practice abominations and pollute the Lord's temple. We still mock the messengers of God. And so we are led back into captivity, into the deeper recesses of the darkness of sin. Yet the Light calls us.

Once upon a time, late in the afternoon, a teenager sneaks into a back pew of the church. He drops his backpack, unplugs his I-pod and stuffs his basketball behind the kneeler. He is sad and overwhelmed by living in that strange land between childhood and adulthood, trying to meet the expectations of teachers to be a scholar, his coaches to be a champion and his classmates to "be cool." In the quiet, he prays: "Lord, it's me..."

In another part of the church, an exhausted businessperson sinks into a seat. It has been a horrible day. He had to let five people go in his small agency. He had no choice: business is drying up. He did everything he could to keep them on; he offered

severance pay and extended benefits. Still, he feels like the worst person who ever lived. He prays, "God, help me keep it together."

And in the front of the statue of Mary, a woman prays her rosary. But her thoughts are elsewhere: another confrontation with her daughter, the illness of her mother, the growing distance between her and her husband. She cries quietly to the Mother of God: "Lord, I'm not sure I can go on."

Grandma was in her glory because her grandchildren were circled all around her. She gloried in their presence, looking at each fresh-scrubbed face, peering, it seemed, deep down into each of their souls. And she liked what she saw.

"Aren't you beautiful!" she would say to the girls, and "Don't you look handsome!" she would exclaim to the boys. Then she would grab hold of each one and pull that child into her big, cozy grandma hug. She would hug them once and say, "This one's for being such a good girl (or boy)." Then another hug. "This one's for helping grandma and grandpa today." Finally a hug with no words. "What's that one for, Grandma?" one of the little ones asked. "That one's just for being you."

Faith is like that final hug. It's not a reward that we earn; it's a gift that we're given -- just for being who we are. We cannot earn our way to the love of God; that's already been given. But there are ways of living and behaving that help us access, accept, and appreciate that gift.

For your reflection this week:

- ! How have I turned away from God, choosing to stay in the darkness of sin, and mocked His messengers -- those showing me how to love more fully?
- ! When have I felt Faith -- the true grace of God -- unwarranted and undeserved? How can I be a sign of that grace and light for others?

Like Nicodemus, we find ourselves coming to Jesus in the middle of our darkest nights, seeking hope and consolation, direction and comfort. In his questions and confusion, his fears and doubts, Jesus welcomes Nicodemus with understanding and compassion. God so loves us that, by His grace, He transforms our darkest nights into the morning light of hope. By His wisdom, He transfigures our Good Friday despair into Easter joy. By His compassion, He heals our broken spirits into hearts made whole. That's worth celebrating! "Laetare!" "Rejoice!" AMEN!

[Readings: Jer. 31:31-34; Psalm 51; Heb 5:7-9; John 12:20-33]

“We would like to see Jesus.”

How do YOU define prayer? Is it merely talking to God, or is it talking to God AND listening to God, and then reflecting on God’s word and work in our lives? According to the ancient Jewish rabbis, there were three kinds of prayer. The first level was simple prayer, made in silence. The second kind of prayer was called “crying out.” You can hear the prayer of crying out. You see it in the news videos from the Middle East recording a scene of violence and death. People waving their hands and crying out in grief, frustration and anger.

The third kind of prayer according to traditional Jews is simply, “tears.” This kind of prayer is open, holy, honest “venting” before God. That is why the so-called “Agony in the Garden” is so significant for Jesus. He moves from inner, silent prayer to crying out loud, to tears which come so fiercely from within him that they become drops of blood. Jesus knew how to pray! He prayed, He cried out in desperation. He cried tears of blood, utterly vulnerable before His Father. A prayer mixed with love and faith.

Next to the precious gifts of love and faith, *time* is another great and precious commodity. Is it the right *time* to say or do this? Is it the wrong *time*? Has *time* run out? How much *time* do we have left?

Jesus Christ was very much aware of time, and the proper time. St. John tells us in his Gospel that at the right precise moment, the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. He speaks of “my hour” and “not my hour.”

Time is understood in the Bible in two ways. The first way is to think of time as linear. The Greek word for this concept is *CHRONOS*. This is the linear measure of time. It has a beginning point, a line of actions and events, and an end-point, or an arrow indicating infinity. We get the word “chronology” from *chronos*. This is how we measure history, science and our individual lives.

The other way of understanding time is called *KAIROS*. This

points to specific moments and events in history and in our individual lives. The time of our birth, marriage, ordination, graduation, promotion, retirement, and death. These are significant and noteworthy moments in the chronology of life.

In John's Gospel, he uses the *Kairos* word often. At the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus says to His Blessed Mother, "My hour (*Kairos*) has not yet come." Today He says, "The hour has come" for the Son of Man to be glorified. The word "glorified" in the New Testament, "*doxa*" means the very glory of God, God's presence. How does that presence of God take place? As we will see, through the death of Jesus. And then through His Resurrection. And ours.

An employee in my last parish and I had an agreement. She would stay on staff until it was the right time to retire. She created a "chronos" while she worked there, a chronology of many years of faithful and conscientious ministry. But when she determined that it was time to retire, she approached me with tears in her eyes and said, "It is *Kairos*." It's time. We cried in each other's arms.

There is one verse in the words of Jesus that follow, which has caused confusion and misinterpretation: "Whoever loves their life loses it, and whoever hates their life in this world will preserve it for eternal life." Does this mean that we should hate our life? When I was in high school and suffering the trials of being a teenager, I said in despair to my mom: "I hate my life. I didn't ask to born!" And she wisely replied, "Neither did I. Welcome to the club!"

We are here because God's love willed us into existence. We are not called to hate our earthly life but to put it into proper perspective, with our eyes focused on eternal life. God comes first, others come second, and we are third.

If we love our earthly life, we know that we lose it in the Lord's service. If we love our earthly life in a selfish way, we just lose whatever we think we have. This process is called "discernment."

The key is to find out through discernment, not what WE want out of life, but what GOD wants for us out of life.

We want to be good and moral people. So we can find some consolation in today's reading from Jeremiah, "I will place my law within them and write it upon their hearts." This is how we serve Jesus Christ and follow Him, so that where He is, His servants will also be. And the Father will honor whoever serves Him.

Today and on Tuesday, we celebrate two feasts: St. Patrick today, and St. Joseph on Tuesday. Guess what? St. Patrick was NOT Irish! He was born either in England or in Wales to Italian parents who were diplomats from Rome living in England! How many of you already knew that? A political raid forced Patrick into slavery, where he was sent to Ireland to labor. He escaped, returned to Rome, where he discerned the call to priesthood. In a dream, he heard the voices of the people of Ireland saying, come back home to us. So, he asked to be sent as a missionary to Ireland.

St. Joseph, husband of Mary and foster father of Jesus, discerned HIS life choices to marry his pregnant fiancé, to leave his homeland for Egypt, to return to a quiet life, and to be faithful to His God. Do YOU want to "see Jesus?" Open your eyes, your ears and your heart to the discernment of the Holy Spirit.

Has YOUR "kairos" moment arrived? There are only two more weeks left of this Lent for this year. Is it "time" for you to "hate your life in this world?" Not to wish that you had never been born, but to realize that you were born for a reason, for an amazing and awesome calling and mission? To die in order to rise?

May we learn obedience through discernment from our life's blessings, joys and sufferings, to follow "the source of eternal salvation for all who obey Him," and "to see Jesus." In this world and in the next. AMEN!

Readings: Isaiah 50:4-7; Psalm 22; Phil. 2:6-11; Mark 14:1-15:47]

That's not the whole story. Perhaps of all of the seven "words" or cries which the four Evangelists tell us that Jesus Christ shouts out as He hangs on His Holy Cross, the one that seems to grab our attention is this one: "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" It comes from the Responsorial Psalm we sing today, Psalm 22, a Psalm which somehow foreshadows the sufferings Jesus endures on Good Friday. Perhaps we want to say the same thing.

But that's not the whole story. The people surrounding Jesus scoff, mock and wag their heads. They are called "dogs," a "pack of evildoers" closing in on Him. They pierce His hands and feet, He can count all His bones. Even the clothes Jesus wore are no longer His: "They divide my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots." But that's not the whole story.

There is one fascinating theory that suggests that Jesus, as He hung, bloody and bruised, recited not only one verse of this psalm, Psalm 22, but the entire Psalm. Yes, it speaks of the very real human emotion of abandonment and desolation. Yes, it refers to the inhumane treatment of a group of people against an innocent person.

But that's not the end of the story.

For the rest of the Psalm says this. Imagine Jesus saying this to you and to me from His sweet and Holy Cross, in a barely audible voice, through parched lips. Imagine YOU saying this to God:

"Our ancestors put their trust in you; they trusted you and you saved them... It was you who brought me safely through birth, and when I was a baby, you kept me safe.

I have relied on you since the day I was born, and you have always been my God. Do not stay away from me! Trouble is near, and there is no one to help... I will tell my people what you have done; I will praise you in their assembly: 'Praise him, you servants of the Lord! Honor him you descendants of Jacob! Worship him you people of Israel!

"He does not neglect the poor or ignore their suffering; he does not turn away from them, but answers when they call for help.

"All nations will remember the Lord; all races will worship him...

"Future generations will serve him; all will speak of the Lord to the coming generation. People not yet born will be told: 'The Lord saved his people!'"

Bring your cross to the altar. Take the greatest sorrows, the greatest struggles, the greatest sins you have committed and bring them to the altar. Come and bring them with confidence. Jesus did not just die. He rose from the dead. Jesus is no longer on the Cross. He is Risen. And He is with us here, and will be with us forever, if we just call upon Him in faith and trust. And THAT is the rest of the story! AMEN!

[Ex. 12:1-8, 11-14; Ps. 116; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; John 12:1-15]

Tonight, as we celebrate the Mass of the Lord's Supper, we enter into the sacred time of the Triduum (Three Days) – our re-presentation of Jesus' life-saving Eucharist, His Death and His Resurrection. As the Jewish people hold the Passover celebration of the Exodus story as their perpetual institution, so are we Christians called each year to commemorate the sacred events of Jesus' final days on earth – leading to the triumph of His Resurrection on Easter.

Tonight, we recall – with solemnity and gratitude – Jesus' institution of the Eucharist, the ordained priesthood, and the mandate to serve -- on the night before His death. In his First Letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul recalls Jesus' loving transformation of the bread and wine of the Passover Meal into His Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity, which will soon be sacrificed for humanity in Jesus' brutal death.

The Catholic Church firmly insists that in the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, Jesus Christ is indeed present. The elements of the Blessed Sacrament do not *represent* the Body and Blood of Jesus; they *ARE* the Body and Blood. "This is my body; this is my blood."

Tonight the Church around the world solemnly celebrates this extraordinary mystery: The substance of the bread changes into the substance of the Body of Christ; the substance of the wine changes into the substance of His Blood. We call this Transubstantiation.

Knowing that His betrayer has already left the room and is preparing to hand Him over, Jesus then opens His heart in a remarkable gesture of love for all time. In a very short time, we will

be sharing in this love that Jesus pours out for us every day as we come to Mass and receive Holy Communion.

Both the Jewish and the Christian traditions call for more than just rituals and remembrances – as important as they are. The people of the time of Moses were told to eat the Passover meal with their loins girt, sandals on their feet, and a staff in hand, to eat as those who are in flight. Ready to flee Egypt and to face the unknown. We too eat, and in doing so, prepare to become people of action.

And yet all around the world, the Gospel for this celebration is the narrative of Jesus washing the feet of the apostles. John does not record the words of institution of the Eucharist as the other three Gospels do. He focuses on the Master's washing the servant's feet.

The Church's decision to read this account on Holy Thursday must reflect a theology that unites Eucharist and service; it encourages us to become other servant Christs. We are to become what we eat, and what we become through this sacrament of service is the living presence of Jesus Christ as servant of the world. Jesus said to them "I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do." Fed by this Eucharist, we, too, are to be servants to the world.

What specifically can you do? There are several ministries and services provided by the parishioners of St. Martin de Porres. They run the range of physical, intellectual and spiritual works, depending on our abilities and our availability. They run the range of something that could be done in one day or one week, or regularly throughout the year. Check our website for details.

Following the Passover Meal, Jesus, Peter, John and James

went to the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. At least Jesus prayed. The Apostles, probably worn out by the emotional intensity of the evening and a long day, slept. The intensity of Jesus' prayer turned His sweat into drops of blood.

Following tonight's Mass, we will process around the church interior and then "sit and pray" for a time of quiet meditation. We will remain with Jesus as He rests in the Altar of Repose. Let us this night remember the importance of what Jesus did for us and does for us. Let us this night re-commit ourselves to prayer, ministry and service. Let us this night thank Jesus for the gift of His very presence in our lives.

I wonder what the disciples were thinking that Thursday morning. You know, did they just think it was another Thursday? Did they just think it was another Passover?

We've been talking a lot about awareness, as we made our journey through Lent. I wonder what sort of awareness the disciples had.

They spent three years of their lives with Jesus. They probably had dinner with Him every night. Did they know this night was different? Did they know this night was special? And when He broke the bread, said the blessing, shared the wine -- what kind of awareness did they have about what was happening? Did they realize they were at one of the most pivotal moments in history? Did they realize they were at the most important meal in the history of the world? Probably not.

I guess the point is that we can wander through life half asleep. We can wander through life unconscious of a lot of really,

really, really important things. And God's constantly trying to wake us up.

And so, as we enter into these very, very sacred days, I think God's probably trying to do the same thing to us. He's probably trying to give us a little shake and say, "Wake up. Pay attention. This is important." And if we do, I think, He always richly rewards us.

So let's let Him shake us, let's let Him wake us up, and let's experience these sacred days like we've never experienced them ever before in our lives. AMEN!

[Since we are not doing the traditional washing of the feet at this Mass, I invite you and challenge you when you get home tonight, that you wash each other's feet before you go to bed. If that is too radical, wash each other's hands. And let me know how it goes!]

[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.

Our catechumens, now called the elect, and our candidates for ongoing conversion stand at the edge of tomb, ready for transformation. So do all of us.

You see, you and I are spiritual butterflies. Some of us are still nestled safe, secure and small in a cocoon which may be too hard for us to crack open. There are monsters under our bed, skeletons in our closets and secrets in our hearts that we still have not brought forth and allowed into the light of the Risen Christ. We are afraid, terrified, of some public or private demon, some fear that still terrorizes us. The fear that I will run out of time, that I will never be loved genuinely by anyone, that I will be hurt again, that what I believe and trust most will leave me shattered.

And yet, 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 like that butterfly -- 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!

Once upon a time, a teacher asked her second grade class what each wanted to be. After all the usual professions were shouted out, little Timmy said, "I want to be possible." The teacher asked, "What do you mean, possible?" And little Timmy responded: "Well, my mom is always telling me that I'm impossible. So when I get big, I want to be possible!"

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.

The fluid of Christ's Body and Blood which we receive in this Eucharist gives strength to our wings and enable us to soar to new heights. The power of the Holy Spirit outpoured in the Sacrament of

Confirmation gives us the wisdom, the courage, the right judgment and the holiness to walk with angels. The best is yet to be!

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.

The Risen Jesus quiets those fears. Darkness yields to dawn. Now there is life where there was death. It's all about the goodness and the rawness of life.

We began this Vigil in darkness. Then we proceeded in light. We were or will be born into a new creation through water and anointed and confirmed in the faith by the anointing of the Holy Spirit. We peer into the tomb to find only wrapping clothes. Shrouds, once symbols of death, now laid carefully aside, become new symbols of life. You, dear elect and candidates, do not run away from what is given to you tonight!

Continuing the tradition of giving you a present for coming to church at Easter and at Christmas, we are happy to present you with Gus Lloyd's latest Book: *A Minute in the Church – Back to Basics, Catholic Beliefs and Practices*

Thumb through the book and let the Holy Spirit stop you on the right pages. It's only fifty pages!

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 and to celebrate a Happy Easter! THAT is worth celebrating and calling it Resurrection Sunday. And then, healed, raised and cleaned off, we can become the Divine Word

News Service, and share that Good News with those who need to hear it. “Tell us, Mary, what did you see?” “Let me tell you!”

We pray this evening for your prayers so that they may be the catalyst for those here present who are still stuck in their tombs. We pray that one day all of us can move from the darkness of death and the tomb into the Easter light of Resurrection glory and new life.

AMEN! ALLELUIA!

[Readings: Acts 10:34a, 37-43; Ps. 118; I Cor. 5:6b-8; John 20:1-9]

Happy Easter! Christ is risen, Christ is truly risen! When I was a student at Orchard Lake St. Mary's College, I learned how to say this in Polish: "Wesołego Alleluja! Chrystus zmartchwywstał, zaprawde zmartchwywstał!" When I was a student in Rome, I learned how to say it in Italian: "Buona Pasqua! Cristo e risorto! Veramente e risorto!" Unfortunately, I would forget the rolled letter r in the middle of the word and said, "Cristo e risotto," which means, "Christ is rice! He truly is rice!"

Do YOU tend to come to church only at Christmas and Easter? If you do, thank you. You are teaching us something very important, which we who attend more regularly forget and can take for granted.

You are teaching us that the two greatest things Jesus Christ did for us was to become one like us in all things but sin at Christmas, and to show us how we could become like Him. And then to love us so much that He takes even our sinful humanity with Him on the Cross; to save us and to rise from the dead as the very first human being to be resurrected. The Catholic Church teaches that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, which we honor today and for the next fifty days, is the crowning truth of our faith.

One of my favorite Easter stories in the Gospels is the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Two short and tragic days after Good Friday, these disciples were walking away from Jerusalem and from the first Christian community in defeat and dejection. They had lost hope. We too, have moments of despair and desolation.

In those moments, the Risen Lord Jesus accompanies us along the road, even when we are moving in the wrong direction! Only the Lord can "break open" the Word in order to help us understand the stories of our lives, especially suffering. Only the Lord can rekindle our energy and our resolve to devote ourselves to what is most important in life, serving Him alone.

The encounter on the road leads to the table, the breaking of the bread and the total gift of self. Recognition of the Risen Lord is always linked with the Eucharist.

At the heart of our Christian life is this meal of Word and Eucharist which we celebrate every Sunday. The Risen Lord presides over all our journeys, wishing to set our hearts on fire in generous service to all people in need, near and far. The gift we have received is the gift we share. Humbly, we set out on the various roads of our lives to respond to all the hungers of the human family.

The account of Jesus' presence with the two confused, troubled disciples on the road to Emmaus is a graced opportunity for us, in the midst of this moment when we wish we could be somewhere else and in some other time.

It is this encounter that only happens when we hear God's Word and share in the Most Holy Eucharist that we imitate and recreate the Easter event! We welcome you to this Easter Sunday Mass and invite you to come every week to make Jesus real and to celebrate together His Presence in our worship and in our lives!

Teresa Tomeo is a syndicated Catholic talk-show host, author of numerous books and an international speaker. Building a relationship with Jesus is critically important, Tomeo said, something to which everyone needs to strive. "We were made for relationship," Tomeo said. "First with God and then with each other. Who better to have a strong relationship with than the one who knows us so intimately because he created us?"

Something -- or, more accurately, Someone -- will be missing in our lives if we don't have that relationship with God first, she said. "We may have good marriages and numerous friends, but we are never completely fulfilled without Christ." Tomeo offers four potential first steps for those trying to build a stronger relationship with Jesus.

1. Surrender daily. Before I leave my man cave in the rectory every morning, I pray the Prayer of Abandonment of Blessed Charles de Foucauld:

Father, I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures.

I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul; I offer it to you

with all the love of my heart, for I love you, Lord,

and so need to give myself, to surrender myself into your hands,

without reserve, and with boundless confidence, for you are my Father.

And, as I leave my man cave, I can hear the Father say, "I'm going to hold you to this, Nick!"

2. Immerse yourself in Scripture. Learn about God from the Holy Word He has given us. People often tell me that they talk to God, but that God never talks back to them. But God does. God speaks to us through His Word in the Bible. Take time to read, to learn, and to pray God's Holy Words.

3. Study the Catholic faith. Learn what the Church says and what the Church does NOT say about life and faith. Get a copy of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Lives of the Saints. Rule Number One: No matter who or what we think we are, we find our identity only in God, by virtue of our baptism. We are a son or daughter of God, and a brother or sister in Jesus Christ. The Church teaches the truth about who we are, and what we are. Archbishop Fulton Sheen said decades ago that our society and our culture have perverted that identity and claim it to be our "truth." That is NOT the "truth" about us. It is all lies. Don't believe them!

4. Spend time with Jesus by regular attendance at Sunday Mass, Confession, and visits with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Consider this a "date" with Jesus to give Him your time and attention. Give God "Five and Five." Give God five minutes every morning and five minutes every evening. When you

wake up in the morning, thank God for the light of another day. Go over your day with Him. Tell Him that you won't face your day alone, but with God walking with you and within you.

At night, before you go to bed, go over your day with God. Thank God for the many hidden blessings you have been given in the day. Think of those moments when you were less than you could have been, when you may have made bad choices, even sinned, and ask God's forgiveness.

Do YOU want to see Jesus? Come where He lives, join us, and have life abundantly!

I close with this meditation on Easter joy:

WE WERE MADE FOR EASTER JOY!

In spite of delay, denial, disappointment,
disaster, disease and demise.

WE WERE MADE FOR JOY!

May JOY be found, surround, abound,
and astound you all the days of your life!

WE WERE MADE FOR JOY!

AMEN, ALLELUIA!