

Third Sunday of Easter, Year A
Acts 2:14, 22-23
Ps 16 *passim*
1Pet 1:17-21
Lk 24:13-35

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Despite how unusual this year's observance of Holy Week was, we are nonetheless basking in the glorious afterglow of the Resurrection. In the ancient Church, Christians had a greeting that they exchanged during the Easter season, a greeting that was as pervasive as "Merry Christmas" is today in the month of December. Among the original Greek-speaking Christians, that greeting was "Christos anestē!" And the response was "Alēthos anestē!" When the Church spread to Rome where people spoke Latin, it became "Christus resurrectus!" And the response: "Vere resurrectus!" In English, it is "Christ is risen!" and the response is "He is risen indeed!" For some reason I can't fathom Protestants have preserved this tradition but for the most part Catholics have not, at least not in this country. That's a shame. And so I greet you, wholeheartedly and full-throatedly, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!

In these first few Sundays of Easter the Gospels focus on the appearances of the Risen Lord Jesus to the apostles and the disciples. They make it plain that Jesus's resurrection is not like the raising of Lazarus we read about in the Fifth Sunday of Lent. Lazarus was resuscitated; he was restored to his previous life, and he would be expected to grow old and die all over again, eventually. Not so with Jesus. Jesus is more than resuscitated: he is risen from the dead; he is resurrected. He will never die again. He is the light who has conquered darkness and death and sin.

Jesus the Resurrected Lord is not subject to the same natural laws as the rest of us. As we saw last week, the apostles were sheltering in place behind locked doors. But locked doors and solid walls were no barrier to Jesus. He appeared in their midst, took Thomas by the hand, and made Thomas poke at the wounds of his passion and death.

Jesus, it appears, didn't look like his pre-Resurrection self. People who knew Jesus, people who knew him well, didn't recognize him right away. The first one he appeared to, according to John the Evangelist, was Mary of Magdala, and she took him for the groundskeeper! She didn't realize the man she was talking to was Jesus, not until he called her by name. And the next words he spoke to her were "Don't cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father." Mary Magdalene, and the apostles too, had to let go of the old Jesus. They had to understand that the Resurrection did not mean they got the old Jesus back, the Jesus they knew and loved. No, resurrection meant that Jesus stepped into his glory and was turning the work of fixing this broken world to his Church.

And so it is with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Cleopas and his companion, most likely his wife, are returning home from Jerusalem. They don't recognize the man who joins them along the way. Visibly downcast, they explain that they had had such high hopes that this prophet Jesus was the Christ, the long-awaited Messiah who would liberate Israel from its overlords. But the power establishment crucified him, so now they were heading back to the same old same old. And the man broke open the Scriptures and showed them how in place after place the Scriptures pointed to the suffering Messiah. Afterwards they remarked on how zealous they felt as the man spoke, how their hearts seemed to burn at the intensity. Reaching their destination, they invited him to join them for the evening meal. As they were sitting at table, the man did what Jesus did on the night before he died: he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. And that's when they recognized him as Jesus. And with that flash of recognition, he disappeared from their sight. They were already disciples, already followers of Jesus, but at table in the town of Emmaus they experienced Jesus in a new way. Just as he had told Mary of Magdala, the risen Lord Jesus is a new and different Jesus, a Jesus whom we find in the Church, whom we recognize in the breaking of the bread.

On May 24 we will remember Jesus's ascension into heaven, when he makes a final promise: "I am with you always, until the end of time." He had already promised that he would not leave us orphans. He left us the Church. He left us the sacraments, in the care of the Church. He left us most particularly the sacrament of the Eucharist, where we experience the real presence of the risen Lord Jesus – body and blood, soul and divinity – in the breaking of the bread.

Last Sunday we saw the apostles quarantining themselves behind a locked door. They were afraid, and Jesus appeared in their midst, saying "Peace be with you." And then Jesus breathed on them. We too have been shut off in our homes. We too are afraid. So many places, including our places of worship, are off-limits. In this state of medical emergency, we are alone. But we are still in communion. Jesus still comes to us; Jesus still breathes on us, and he breathes into us the breath of life, filling us with the Holy Spirit. We long to return to normal, and, knowing full well that the new normal will be different, we look forward to welcoming Jesus once again into our hearts and into our bodies *physically*, not just spiritually – physically, body and blood as well as soul and divinity. The risen Lord Jesus looks forward to that day as well. He is with us always, until the end of time.

Christ is risen! Alēthos anestē! Vere resurrectus! He is risen indeed!