

THIRD SUNDAY

OF EASTER

YEAR A



FIRST READING

Acts 2:14, 22–33

PSALM

Psalm 16:1–2, 5, 7–11

SECOND READING

1 Peter 1:17–21

GOSPEL

Luke 24:13–35

Prayer

Psalm 16:1–2, 5, 7–11

Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.”

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.

I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.

For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Reading the Word

First Reading: Acts 2:14, 22–33

Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

“You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as

you yourselves know—this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. For David says concerning him,

‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope.

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

“Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, ‘He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.’

This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.

Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear.

Second Reading:

1 Peter 1:17–21

If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.

He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

Gospel:

Luke 24:13–35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had hap-

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pened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going

on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Hearing the Word

"Hopes and Expectations Revised"

The third Sunday of Easter continues to focus on the resurrection, and on how it changes people's hopes and expectations for the future. Both the disciples of Jesus and the Israelites of his day had rather specific views regarding what the future holds. Through his resurrection, Jesus dramatically revised and modified these hopes and expectations, giving his followers a glimpse of what God intended and prepared for them.

The first reading contains a part of the first speech of Peter delivered right after the Pentecost. Peter proclaims Jesus' resurrection and, quoting Psalm 16, shows that it was already anticipated in the Old Testament. This proves that Jesus' death and resurrection were not accidental, but that God had intended to endow human-

ity with eternal life from the very beginning of creation. At the same time, the speech demonstrates how the hopes and expectations of various groups were revised by this pivotal event. First, Peter emphasises that the Jewish leaders together with the Roman authorities conspired to kill Jesus. They acted out of jealousy and fear, aiming to protect their own social position and secure their influence over the people. Their expectations were clear; by executing Jesus they hoped to remove permanently a potential threat and rival to their leadership. Their expectations failed spectacularly. In fact, by killing Jesus they initiated a wholly new movement that would eventually become the Church. This Christian community, built upon Jesus' resurrection, was to endure while the institutions that condemned Jesus have long since vanished.

Peter also referred to David's anticipation of the "resurrection of the Messiah". Peter and most of his fellow Jews expected the Messiah to be a Davidic King, whose political and military power would restore the Israelite kingdom on earth. This restoration was to be accomplished by military and political means, and lead to the defeat of the Roman empire. However, having encountered the risen Lord, Peter was forced to revise his expectations regarding the Messiah and his mission. The defeat of the Roman armies and political leadership was not to be his work. The Messiah would conquer a much greater enemy – death itself.

Addressing his fellow Israelites, Peter also implied that they would have to revise their expectations. They are not to expect the restoration of the earthly kingdom of Israel, but a very different renewal – the restoration of humanity. This is conveyed through the reference to

Hades, which people at the time believed was the underworld, the place for the dead. After Jesus' resurrection, the future for believers does not lead to Hades, but to the presence of God in eternity, where Christ is already enthroned. Jesus' resurrection indeed modified people's expectation for the future at all levels.

The second reading emphasises the centrality of Jesus' resurrection, and sets the proper focus for hopes and expectations regarding the future. When 1 Peter was written, a vast majority of people believed that their gods were to be pleased, entreated and appeased by offerings of money and performing sacrifices. The aim of these practices was to appease the anger of gods and secure their favour, in order to be blessed with material prosperity and security. The author of the letter shows how different Christian faith is. Offerings of silver, gold or the blood of animals achieve nothing. Rather, reconciliation with God was accomplished by the self-sacrifice of Christ who shed his blood once and for all (cf. Heb 9:25-26), with no need for any further sacrifices and offerings. The only thing expected of Christians is a life that follows Jesus' teaching. Such a life can be sustained when a Christian maintains a clear focus on his or her future life in God's presence, "your faith and hope are set on God". Therefore, believers' hopes and expectations must not focus on securing material and earthly prosperity, but rather be directed towards God, and keep eternal life firmly in focus.

The Gospel reading contains the well-known story of the journey to Emmaus. One of the first striking statements in Jesus' conversation with the disciples is, "but we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel". This single line shows how all the disciples

must have felt at the time. All the hopes they had placed in Jesus when they were with him, all the great expectations they had developed as they saw him perform miracles, and teach were shattered by his cruel death. Like most of their compatriots, they expected him to be the Messiah who would bring liberation from subjugation to the Romans, and such hopes had fallen apart.

In the course of their conversation, Jesus showed them their mistake. Their hopes and expectations were misdirected because they had not understood God's intentions and plans correctly. Jesus directed them to the Scripture, and explained God's plan indicated there. He opened their minds to understand God's purposes, and eventually allowed them to recognise himself by re-enacting the last supper by breaking the bread with them. In light of the Scripture and by the breaking of the bread the disciples finally left their misguided hopes and expectations, that had plunged them into sadness, and returned to Jerusalem rejoicing.

In their encounter with the Risen Lord - the Messiah, the disciples experienced liberation. But they were not liberated from Roman oppression as they had expected, but from their own misguided perceptions, hopes and expectations, that held them captive, and prevented them from recognizing who Jesus truly was. This liberation brought them peace,

Jesus' contemporaries, both his adversaries and his disciples, had very specific beliefs and expectations regarding who the Messiah should be and what he should do. These very expectations led the leaders to hand Jesus over to the Romans. False expectations brought disillusionment and despair upon the disciples after Jesus' death. The letter of Peter shows that the early Christians

had to be liberated from the common idea that they can gain God's favour by making money offerings and sacrifices to secure their well-being on earth. These false hopes and expectations were revised by correct reading and interpretation of the Scripture. This shows that in the Scripture believers discover God's guidelines that should shape their hopes and expectations. From the Scripture flows the assurance of the supreme hope and expectation of all God's faithful, well expressed by the Psalmist with the words, "you show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy".

Listening to the Word of God

Revising hopes and expectations in the light of new and often challenging information is never easy. It requires honesty, courage and faith. Honesty to name and own our hopes and expectations, courage to change direction in the light of new information that challenges our beliefs, and faith to act and believe that the change will be beneficial. Let us apply these three principles to three areas of daily life that we are all familiar with: marriage, prejudice and Church community.

When a couple gets married, they have hopes and expectations about married life. For many couples, marriage is seen as a gateway to endless days of joy and living "happily ever after". However, sooner or later they discover new information about their spouse which they were not previously aware of, for example particular habits or weaknesses or strengths. This revelation of the truth about the other requires, if the marriage is to last, a revision of hopes and expectations to align them with reality. How the couple manages this change will determine

whether their marriage will last or not. What is true for marriage, also applies to all other relationships. False expectations destroy friendships, break up working groups and damage parent-children relationships. They can be deadly in all situations.

Another example is prejudice. Many of us hold uncritically negative or positive beliefs about persons who are different from us, such as those belonging to a different ethnic or racial group or religion. When confronted with information that is contrary to our beliefs we are faced with a decision of whether to change our ideas or not. For example, if one believes that members of a particular ethnic group are inferior and then happens to meet someone belonging to that group who does not fit the stereotype, this becomes an opportunity to either revise beliefs about the group or continue with one's prejudice.

Churches of any kind also suffer under the burden of misguided hopes and expectations of their members. Some expect these communities to be perfect, others expect material benefits from belonging to them, yet other expect hero-like, all knowing and impeccable priests or pastors who would speak with God's voice. Still others expect spiritual benefits of unrealistic kind. These include blessing in the form of material benefits, spiritual ecstasy or unceasing happiness. All those hopes are soon shattered, and often lead to "church hopping" when people regularly move from one church to another searching for the one which would provide what they hope for.

Today's liturgy provides an antidote to the illusions of a perfect relationship, danger of prejudice or a desire for an elusive ideal community. Those illusions often disrupt our relationships, blind us to the truth, obscure the picture of God and make lives generally unhappy. It is in the careful attention to the Scripture and our faith that we may find healing for our delusions. This was the method which Jesus used to transform the shattered world of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The Scripture allows us to see and hope for what God intends for us. Our faith teaches us that all communities and relationships are created by imperfect people whom we ought to respect and accept, and to love with Jesus-like sacrificial love. Guided by these principles, we will be happier and more balanced, as our illusions and delusion will no longer hold a grip on us.

Proverb

“Don't
look
where
you fell
but where
you
slipped.”

Action

Self-examination

In what areas of my life do I feel let down by Jesus? What does this reveal about the expectations and hopes that I have for him?

Am I flexible enough not to be driven by what I imagine or want, when those desires prove unattainable?

Response to God

I pray that Jesus would open my heart and mind to understand the purposes of God for me. I make my prayer with Psalm 119:18, "Open my eyes Lord that I may see the wondrous things in your law"

Response to your World

I will reflect on the hopes and expectations that my family, friends or community have of me, and try to determine which are reasonable and which are not. I will act on the former.

In our group we will conduct a Bible study to help us determine what expectations would God have of us in our particular circumstances of life, and how we can respond to them.

Prayer

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my thoughts. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting (Ps 139:23-24).