

# THE THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

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In this morning's gospel lesson, we return one more time to Easter day – though the beginning of this lesson even still has a tint of Holy Week.

- Jesus has risen, but the disciples haven't put the pieces together yet to realize what that means.
- All they know is that after spending years in the presence of Jesus, he's gone, and everything they understood about the relationship is different.

In some ways, this is a transition that we all have to go through in our relationship with God – and one where many, many people get stuck.

Early on in our relationship with God – when we're trying to form a personal connection or even wondering if there's one to be had – we're kind of like the disciples pre-Holy Week.

- God makes himself fairly easy to find, we learn how and where to look for him, just like the disciples in the physical presence of Jesus.
- When I pray, I feel good; when I read the Bible, I see new things or experience them in a new way.

God does this because he's always trying to disclose himself to us, and in the beginning what we need to know is that he wants to bless us and he can.

- But a relationship that's based on what we can get out of it isn't going to be a very close relationship,
- And so God always tries to draw us deeper, and often he does this by lessening the flow of consolations and good feelings.
- While it seems like he's withdrawn and pulled back, that's only because we haven't learned to distinguish the blessings from the Blesser.

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This is where a lot of people freak out and fall back because they don't understand what God is doing.

- They're still looking at God as someone that's supposed to respond to them in an almost mechanical way – I do this, God does that.
- When that doesn't happen when they want and the way they want, they get disappointed, frustrated, or feel like God isn't present.

We can start to doubt the experiences we've had or lose our motivation for prayer, and the relationship starts to slide.

- While the disciples on the road to Emmaus aren't doubting their experiences with Jesus, they *are* starting to wonder if they misread them or got carried away.
- But even though they're not sure what to do next, because Jesus *hasn't actually* left them, they unintentionally give us a picture of what to do.

The first thing that we need to understand is that what God is doing at this stage is giving us the opportunity to participate in the relationship.

- Instead of just letting him do things for us, now we can do something for him.
- When we keep praying, reading the Bible, and so on even though it doesn't feel as good, we're starting to do those things less for us and more for God, which is what deeper, more mature relationships look like.

Another thing to remember is that God doesn't just drop out of the picture – he's still with us, giving us what we need.

- The disciples aren't sure what to do, so Jesus comes and strikes up a conversation with them Himself.
- They're praying without realizing it, which is why their hearts are burning within them.

It reminds us to pray for whatever it is we need – if we're struggling, pray for God to show up and let you know he's there.

- It's not wrong to ask and you can't ask for too much.
- Thomas demanded to put his hands and fingers in Jesus' wounds – and Jesus showed up and offered them!

Just remember to keep your heart open – God will give you what you need, which isn't always exactly what you've asked for.

- The disciples wanted Jesus to stay with them, even before they knew it was him.
- Yet, as soon as they recognized Him, he vanished from their sight – *from their sight*.

That's when they realized what Jesus was doing – by vanishing, He freed them from being limited to knowing His presence only in the way they'd always experienced Him before.

- So when you find that God doesn't seem to be as present and active in your life, keep saying "yes" to God, and seeking him.
- Ask him to increase your faith in his love, and not in a vague, general way,
- but the unique, personal way that he loves *you*, the way that lets you know that he'd never allow himself to be separated from you.

Ask him for a greater faith in *that* love, and as he does you'll find more and more your question becoming, "Lord, what can I do for you?"