

Third Sunday of Easter, Year A: April 26, 2020  
Living Water Inclusive Catholic Community  
Liturgy Conference Call, 1:30 PM  
Homily by Rev. Jacqueline M. Clarys, RCWP-USA

**First Reading:** Acts 2:14, 22–28. **Psalm (16) R:** “You will show us the path that leads to life.”  
**Second Reading:** 1 Peter: 17–21. **Gospel Reading:** Luke 24:13–35.

How often do we miss the Joy that is right in front of us? How often do we base our judgement and our decisions upon a case of mistaken identity? What causes inability “to see?” What is gained by “not seeing?” How do we “un-mask” the Heart? And its doings? These are questions that come to mind as we walk with our friends to Emmaus. The requirements of social, or rather physical, distancing offer a unique perspective as we reflect upon the revealed intimacy of today’s Gospel, in which Jesus was “...made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” The current conversation, speculation, and theological reflection about the effects of responding to a pandemic upon the future of “the church” cover a range of concerns and opinions. Conversation at the institutional level naturally turns to the preservation of tradition. By contrast, conversation at the level of Community may direct its attention to the distillation of meaning to be found in the nexus between Holy Scripture and our lived experience: to follow Jesus is to create our lens of meaning and understanding.

In Acts, we hear portions of Peter’s very first speech to the people, which references Hebrew Bible words they would have known well, from the prophet Joel (2: 23, 27; 3: 1–2)<sup>1</sup>:

“...Rejoice, Children of Zion! Rejoice! Be glad in YHWH your God, who sends you rain—the autumn and spring rains as of old—and a new spring crop....You will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, YHWH, am your God, and there is no other.... After that, I will pour out my Spirit on all humankind. Your daughters and sons will prophesy, your elders will have prophetic dreams, and your young people will see visions. In those days, I

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<sup>1</sup>*The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation* (A Sheed and Ward Book, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007) 339–340.

will pour out my Spirit even on those in servitude, women and men alike.”

Here, religious prophecy confronts tradition: the Spirit is to sidestep leaders and priests, and is to be poured out upon the people, *all of them*. Luke, the author of both the Gospel and Acts, uses references such as this to support his agenda, part of which is to draw a distinction between the people and the religious leadership, the priests.<sup>2</sup> In his Passion recounting, Luke places the burden of rejection of Jesus on the leadership, while reserving a special place for the people who have been witnesses to Jesus’ life and work. Luke’s vision places the common people at the center of Israel’s salvific story, raising their role to “essential worker” status in the fulfillment of the Scriptures. It is *the people* who will bring the kingdom to fruition.

In our second reading, Peter is also addressing the common people, in this case, pagans. The context is their suffering: because of their belief in Jesus, the greater society rejects or shuns them. *Distancing* is the source of their suffering: they are “...being ostracized for their faith.”<sup>3</sup> Peter’s intention is to support them: his letter encourages them to live good lives, as witness to their beliefs. Peter’s encouragement means as much now as it did then—it remains our task to be a living hope to one another. C. Vanessa White, professor of spirituality and theology at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, and an African-American, poignantly writes of virtual liturgies:

“As we...join our pastor on our laptop...we acknowledge those times within our history when we were denied access to full participation in Sunday Eucharist because of the color of our skin. ...we have come to reflect on what does it truly mean to be a part of the Body of Christ? The Scripture in 1 Corinthians 12: “If one

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<sup>2</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, paraphrased, “Luke-Acts” in *The Writings of the New Testament*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Dennis R. Edwards, *The Story of God Bible Commentary: 1 Peter*, Tremper Longman III and Scot McKnight, eds., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 20.

of us suffers, we all suffer, and if one of us is uplifted we all share in the joy” has new meaning during this season of COVID-19.”<sup>4</sup>

One of the free online offerings this week came from my first theology teacher at the Ecumenical Institute, in a video interview entitled, “Racism, Anxiety, Injustice & the Bible.” He is Rev. Dr. Dennis R. Edwards, the first African-American to graduate from Catholic University with a Ph.D. in Biblical Studies. He commented on suffering (paraphrased): “Suffering well involves three things: to acknowledge, and to lament what is so; to trust in God to accompany us in all things—to remember that we are not alone; and then to reframe, in ways that are within our capacity and imagination to do.”<sup>5</sup> May our eyes be open; may we stay present to one another. Then, with the Psalmist, we may say, “Your presence fills me with joy, and Your help delights me forever.”

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<sup>4</sup> C. Vanessa White, “Grace in a moment of fear,” in *National Catholic Reporter*, May 1–14, 2020 (Kansas City, MO: Vol. 56, No. 15.), 6. Online: <http://digital.olivesoftware.com/Olive/ODN/CatholicReporter/default.aspx> (accessed April 25, 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Rev. Dr. Dennis R. Edwards (professor, pastor, theologian, author) on “Racism, Anxiety, Injustice & the Bible” with Dr. Alisha Moreland-Capuia, MD, ABPN, ABMS (Video, April 23, 2020), paraphrased. Online: <https://www.facebook.com/DralishaMD/photos/a.10150303303022982/10157574347612982/?type=3&theater> (accessed April 26, 2020).