



Third Sunday of Easter A
April 26, 2020

- ◆ **Greetings to our Church Family**
- ◆ **Reflection on today's Gospel by Fr. Denis McBride**
- ◆ **More Reflections on today's Gospel by Fr. Flor McCarthy**

Greetings to you, dear Church family!

Here we are—another week on lockdown and social isolation in lovely Brevard. It is our ‘new normal,’ as they say, and we may be in it for a lot longer than we ever thought. I surely hope I’m very wrong.

I like to ask school children if they tend to look at the cup as “half-full or as half-empty.”

During this period of ‘new normal,’ it is very easy to only focus on the cup as half-empty (e.g., I don’t like the isolation, I miss my friends, etc.), and lose sight of the cup that is half- or three-quarters full (e.g., I don’t have the virus, I have food, shelter, family and friends, money to pay my bills, etc. If we have all these things, we are very blessed.

Having said that, I know that people in our Church family have very real challenges, such as loss of employment, other health issues, parents working from home while helping children with online learning, and worrying about elderly loved ones, especially those in nursing homes. I know some parishioners are finding the isolation very hard, and they feel very lonely especially when family members live out of town and are unable to visit them. Then there are parishioners and non-parishioners who are on the front lines of this battle: doctors, nurses, EMTs, police officers and firefighters. All these brothers and sisters should be in our daily prayers.

I continue to be very grateful...

- ◆ To our technology team who uploads our weekly Mass to our website:
 - Anna Nagy who puts in *many* hours each week editing the Mass we videotape on Tuesdays
 - John Baillie, our parish and school technology person

- Sterling Warner who helps set up the weekly Mass and is a great resource as we currently install a new sound system in Church.
 Going forward, we hope to have one Mass livestream each Sunday after we get back to Church.

- ◆ To Katie Gander, our Music & Liturgy Director, who co-ordinates all the details of our weekly liturgy.
- ◆ To all of you who tell others about our video Mass. I feel bad for parishioners who do not have a computer. We do mail the bulletins to them and other postings like this.

Even though our bulletin can be accessed online, hard copies are available in Church (look for the big plastic basket under a table outside the main doors).

- ◆ To Jerry and Olga Kelly and our Social Concerns volunteers who co-ordinate our outreach to the needy. I thank all of you who bring food items to the baskets outside the Church’s main doors.
- ◆ To all of you who keep up your **church donations** through direct-giving, mail-in, or drop-off at our Parish Office drop box. I am glad to report that about 55 parishioners have recently signed up for direct-giving. Direct-giving enables us to be consistent in our financial stewardship to our Parish.

At the end of this month, we will be in a better position to assess how Covid-19 is impacting our Offertory. Weekly, we receive about \$6,000 in cash donations (\$3,800 in offertory envelopes and \$2,200 in loose cash). If you are a cash donor, please continue if that is your preferred way of donating.

- ◆ To our Parish Office staff and our Deacons who are helping me to call all of our 2,100 registered parishioners to see how they are doing. Our calls are very much appreciated. If you did not hear from us yet, please know we are not finished calling. I know some of you stay in touch with other parishioners; please continue to do so. Sadly, we are finding that we do not have the phone numbers or email addresses for many of our parishioners. [Didn’t you know that failure to provide your parish with your contact

information could cause complications when you finally check in with St. Peter upstairs? You could end up in ‘anonymous heaven’ AFTER spending an extra 500 days in ‘anonymous Purgatory.’☺] But, seriously, it does help us greatly when we have your contact information, especially an email address.

The Chinese word for *crisis* has two translations: danger and opportunity. During a time of crisis, one danger is when we allow negative spirit to only focus on the bad things in our lives. It is okay to sit with our pain and grief, but we should not allow that to totally consume our thinking. God is always seeking to bring good out of bad, always wanting to turn our bad Fridays into an Easter Sunday. For this to happen, we have to work hard on allowing God’s ‘sufficient grace’ to help us move that big rock covering our grave so that good will come forth from the pain and sorrow. You may say, “Easier said than done!” I agree. But at least we must know that this is what we should be seeking to do.

Reflection question:

Can you name something good that has come out during this time of Covid-19?

Some ministries continue at Ascension during Covid-19

Even though the doors of the Church, the school and other facilities are closed, not all ministries have shut down at the parish.

- ◆ As you know, we have Mass celebrated remotely, which is way better than no Mass in any form—as is the case in remote areas of the world.
- ◆ Our Ascension school students are daily engaged in online learning.
- ◆ Our Life Teen and Edge programs have been meeting virtually for the past month and will continue to do so each week until further notice.
- ◆ Laura Dodson continues to meet remotely with our RCIA brothers and sisters who cannot wait to be received into Full Communion with our universal Church family. Laura is also available to anyone interested in beginning the process of inquiring into our Church.

- ◆ “The Pearls of Great Price” is a group of ladies who seek to find the “Pearl of great price”, the wisdom that God has for us to find in Prayer, Scripture reading, Fellowship and Service. The pearls of great price meet every day at 2pm on Zoom.
- ◆ Our outreach to those in need of food continues to be carried out by our Social Concern volunteers and by The *Children’s Hunger Project*. For more information, contact Mary at (321)720-6268 or visit childrenshungerproject@ascensioncatholic.net.

Did I miss any other groups that are Zooming during this Covid-19 time?

Fr. Denis McBride’s Reflection on Today’s Gospel

Over the years, I have often shared with you reflections by Redemptorist priest Fr. Denis McBride. The following is his reflection on today’s Gospel. I really enjoyed it.

Maude & Harry

Maude and Harry have been happily married for six years. It hasn’t been bliss all the way, but they’ve become the best of friends in their struggle to live a genuine life together with their two children. One evening Harry is having a drink with an old friend, John, who was best man at his wedding. As they exchange notes on married life, Harry tells John how he has loved Maude from the first moment he set eyes on her.

John contradicts him. He says: “Harry, old son, you’ve forgotten that I introduced you to Maude. Remember? You heard her talking at a party I was giving, and when you heard her rabbiting on, you said that whoever married her would be marrying a mobile Oxford English dictionary!”

Which of them is right? John remembers the event as it was then. But Harry remembers it as something more - an event that led to where he is now. Because Harry is in love now, he takes that love back in time and invests the past with a new significance. His relationship with Maude now affects the way he remembers their beginnings: he gives their first meeting a significance it never had at the time because he reads it in the light of his present love. His love actually changes the past.

Because we change, we review our past differently. We keep re-interpreting the past in the light of what is going on now in our lives. What appeared to be a mountain at the time turns out to be a mole-hill; what appeared to be a chance encounter becomes the most important meeting of our lives. Often the meaning of an

experience is unclear at the time of the experience. We have to wait for meaning. Only then can we understand.

Making sense of Jesus' death

In today's Gospel, two disciples are struggling to make sense of a recent event: the death of Jesus. They leave Jerusalem over their shoulder as the place where their hopes met with final defeat. When a stranger joins them on the road, they tell the story of their disappointment. Jesus, the one they had hoped would set Israel free, is now dead. In their story it becomes clear that they cannot hold two things together: their hope in Jesus and his death. The death of Jesus cancels out their hope. They feel hopeless and helpless.

The two disciples cannot understand how the death of Jesus can be understood as anything more than a tragic end to a life of promise. Like most people, they believe that if you haven't achieved what you set out to do before your death, you will never achieve it in death itself. When you are dead, it's too late for everything. Death is the end of the road of promise. So the disciples mourn not only the death of Jesus but the death of their relationship with him. Now they are ex-disciples of a dead prophet. With faces to match their story.

Only when they have finished their own story does the stranger begin his own. He invites them to look at the past again, this time in the light of scripture. He gives a wholly different interpretation of the same event as he sees the death of Christ as something which was essential for his glory. According to the stranger, the death of Jesus was the achievement of his mission—not the collapse of it.

As the stranger helps the two disciples to make sense of the past in a new light, they respond by inviting him to stay with them. When they go in to table, they break bread together. The stranger gives himself away by giving himself away to them. He is the risen Jesus, and he leaves them with hearts that burn and with eyes that see. Not only does he help them to interpret the past in their new experience of him as Lord, he gives them a new future. They can now face Jerusalem even in the dark, and they return there to share their story with the others.

Bringing the past up to date

In their new experience of Jesus as Lord, the disciples' past is changed. They can now revisit the past with the new light and the new love that they have experienced. They take the light of Easter Sunday back into the darkness of Good Friday, and everything looks different now. Only the risen Jesus makes sense of everything that went before. In his word and in the

breaking of the bread, the past is brought up to date. The past is now interpreted in the light of the great truth that Jesus is risen and is Lord.

When we gather here each week to celebrate the eucharist, we too listen to the word of God and break bread together. Jesus comes among us not as the stranger; rather, he comes to us in word and sacrament to give us new hope to face the future with faith in him. Our own stories may not sound very different from the two forlorn disciples on the road to Emmaus: we too may be covered in disappointment; we too may have a past that makes little sense to us. But we are invited to tell our stories to the Lord, to listen to him as he speaks his word, and to recognize him in the breaking of the bread. Only then can we look with understanding at the past, and with hope look to the future.

(Used with permission granted by Denis McBride CSSR, *Seasons of the Word*.)

Two Reflections on the Sunday Readings by Fr. Flor McCarthy

Our story too

The story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is one of the loveliest stories in the Gospel. But how does it connect with us?

There is a painting by the Dutch painter, Rembrandt, of Jesus sitting at table between the two disciples. The painting tries to capture the rapture on the faces of the disciples at the moment they recognize Jesus.

There was a guide whose job it was to show Rembrandt's painting to visitors to the museum where it hung. He always began by telling them the story behind the picture, the story we just read in the Gospel. Sadly, for many years he told the story mechanically and without conviction.

Then his wife, whom he loved dearly, got cancer, and died a slow, agonizing death. He could see absolutely no meaning in her terrible suffering and untimely death. She was a good person. She didn't deserve to die like that. He was heart-broken. For him it was as if the world had come to an end. Nevertheless, sometime after the funeral, he was persuaded to go back to work at the museum. So once again he found himself telling the story, only more mechanically than before.

Then one day something clicked inside him, and suddenly he realized that the story was not just about those two disciples. It was about him too.

Like those two disciples, he was going down a sad and lonely road. Even though he was a believer, up to this, Jesus had been little more than a figure who lived only in the musty pages of the gospels. But now Jesus came alive for him. He felt his presence at his side, the

presence of a friend who knew all about human suffering.

At that moment his eyes were opened and he saw things differently. It was as if he was hearing the Easter message for the first time. His heart began to burn within him. Jesus was alive! Therefore, his beloved wife, who believed in Jesus, was alive too, because Jesus overcame death not just for himself but for us too.

He went on telling the story at the museum, only now he told it differently. He told it with feeling and conviction. As he did so, a healing process was at work inside him. And he began to hope and live again.

So what's the connection with us? The connection is that all of us have some experience of the road to Emmaus. The road to Emmaus represents the road of disappointment, failure, sorrow, grief, and broken dreams.

The risen Lord is with us on this road, even though we may not recognize him. He shows us that God brings good out of evil, life out of death, and glory out of pain and suffering.

The resurrection of Jesus opens all our stories to the prospect, not just of a good ending, but of a glorious ending. He has made it possible for us to enter the dark kingdom of death with hearts buoyed up with hope.

Sharing the story

After every death, our relationship with the one who has died is changed but goes on. It is even intensified for a time. But it is now one-sided. This is illustrated in the story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

As they made their way homewards, they were talking about Jesus. He had filled their lives with meaning, hope and joy. And now that he was dead, they were haunted by his absence. They had believed that he was the long-awaited Messiah. But the crucifixion had reduced that dream to rubble. So now they were going away from Jerusalem.

Peoples' lives are shattered by the death of someone they love, especially if that death was sudden or tragic. Life comes to a standstill on the day the loved one dies. The bereaved stay fixed there, without plans or interests. They may even feel guilty about living, especially about enjoying themselves. After the death of Jesus, his disciples experienced all of this—and more.

But help came to them from outside. The risen Jesus joined them, only they didn't recognize him. This is a feature common to all the resurrection stories—Jesus is not immediately recognizable. This is a way of making the point that resurrection is not a return to earthly life as before.

The raising of Jesus was not like the raising of Lazarus. Lazarus returned to ordinary human existence; there is no suggestion that he was glorified, or that he

would not have to die again. Jesus, on the other hand, is portrayed as conquering death, as returning immortal and glorified.

With a simple, direct question, asked in a kindly manner, Jesus got the two disciples to open up. And they began to pour out their sad story to him. He listened patiently as all that was dammed up inside them poured out.

Only when they had finished did he begin to talk. He took up the story where they had left off. He opened their minds to a new way of looking at the Scriptures. He showed them how all the prophets had foretold that the Messiah would suffer and die, and thus enter into glory.

Later, when they were having supper, he took the cake of bread. Blessed it, broke it, and gave each of them a piece—just as Jesus had done at the Last Supper. Suddenly their eyes were opened and they recognized the stranger. He was none other than Jesus! But at that moment he disappeared from their sight.

So their beloved Jesus was alive, and had entered into glory! And what was the glory? It was his triumph over evil and death. So his death, far from being the end of the dream, was precisely the way it was realized.

This encounter with the risen Jesus enabled the disciples to turn their lives around. They returned to Jerusalem, and resumed their discipleship and their ties with the community.

The life of each of us can be looked on as a series of stories that coalesce over time to form one story. However, the sad fact is, all our stories end in death. We do not like stories that end like that. We want our stories to end happily. The resurrection of Christ opens all our stories to the prospect, not just of a good ending, but also of a glorious ending.

Death seems to be the destruction of every relationship. But this is not so. The ties we had with the deceased in life are not ended in death. Our loved ones have gone from us. But they have not disappeared into nothingness. The first and last words in each of our stories belong to God.

Story

There is a story about a dying Buddhist monk who asked a Catholic priest to instruct him in the truth of the faith. The priest did his best to comply with the monk's wishes. Afterwards, the monk thanked him, but added, "You filled my mind with beautiful thoughts, but you left my heart empty."

Emptiness of heart is a sorry state. Beautiful thoughts can nourish the mind. But they can't nourish the heart. Only an experience of love can nourish the heart.

What did Jesus do for those two forlorn disciples on the road to Emmaus? He certainly illuminated their minds. But he did something better. He set their hearts on fire. “Were not our hearts burning within us as he explained the scriptures to us?”

Christian faith is concerned with the mind in so far as it has to do with doctrines. But it is even more concerned with the heart. It consists essentially in a relationship of love with the God who first loved us. Without this, faith is like a fireplace without a fire.

Each of us has a unique story to tell—the story of our lives. However, the sad fact is, all our stories end in death. We don’t like a story that ends like that. We want our stories to end happily. The resurrection of Jesus opens all our stories to the prospect, not just of a good ending, but also of a glorious ending. Surely that should set our hearts on fire.

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Prayer for the United States

*Almighty God, we make our earnest prayer
that you will keep the United States in
your holy protection;
that you will incline the hearts of the citizens
to respect government and entertain a
brotherly affection and love for one
another and for the fellow-citizens of the
United States at large.
Dispose us all to do justice, to love mercy,
and to demean ourselves with that
charity, humility and pacific temper of
mind which were the characteristics of
the Divine Author of our blessed religion
and without which we can never be a
happy nation.
Grant our supplication, we beseech you,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

A Blessed Easter Season,

