

3RD SUNDAY EASTER (A)

APRIL 6, 2008

ACTS 2:14, 22-33

1 PETER 1:17-21

LUKE 24:13-35

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AS LONG AS THERE IS HOPE....

How often we have heard the expression at the bedside of a terminally ill person, "As long as there is life, there is hope." That is a true statement. Equally true is the reverse of that axiom, "*As long as there is hope, there is life.*" Without hope we shrivel and die. It is hope that has kept many a stranded mountain climber or hiker alive until a rescue team can find him/her. It is hope that keeps prisoners of war alive during their seemingly endless captivity. They may live on the edge of hope; yet *as long as there is hope, there is life.*

Our Gospel today is hope lost, and hope restored, - about a *l o n g* hard walk, as it was once put to me, into the face of the wind of hopelessness, a *s h o r t* walk with the wind of hope at the back.

Jesus was executed as a common criminal of the state. It was Friday, then it was Saturday, and the grief of that death began to sink into the followers of Jesus. *How could he die like that with all that his words and actions promised while he was with them? How could he be so cruel?* These two travelers of the Gospel, like many others, wanted to believe he was the Messiah, the redeemer of Israel. A lost hope! Everyone knew that he was dead, and everyone shrank back into a world of hopelessness. Then it was Sunday, the crushing reality of a new week dawned upon them. It was time, and perhaps even necessary for them to leave Jerusalem that they might not be recognized as 'his' followers. It was too dangerous to remain. They

had to rebuild a life now without the presence and power they felt when they were with Jesus, a life without the future and vision for the kingdom of God he helped them believe was so wonderfully imminent.

As they retraced their steps out of Jerusalem with ponderous, fearful steps, they could not help but remember only too well how swiftly they came into the city a few days before with others, singing 'hosanna' and waving palms before their hope, their Messiah. Now they walked away with the heavy steps of disillusionment and despair. Grief – as it struck them down sucked the very life force out of them. *"How do we carry on when everything we have lived for, and hoped for, is taken away?"* This is the question that haunts the minds of the grief-stricken, and it is the question these two pondered along the way, at times not sure what they were saying, at times in a heavy silence except for the sound of their sandals on the road.

In living long enough, there is not one of us who has not walked where those two are walking. What they lost, along with the death of Jesus himself, is hope. We can hear it in their voices when they try to explain the recent events and their feelings to the 'stranger' who suddenly joins them along the way. *"We had hoped Jesus would be the one to redeem Israel."* The irony of it all is that it was to Jesus they were speaking these words. He had come back for such hope-starved souls as these. But when hope is stretched to its limits, or gone, it is difficult to recognize a new day, even when it dawns. And it dawns. When we, like those disciples, lose hope, it is all but impossible to recognize the presence of love and care, even when surrounded by it.

Jesus, however, is not upset with them for failing to recognize him. He is patient, not giving up on them, and walks further with them. He opens their minds – probably the most coherent conversation they have had in awhile – opening their minds to understand the Scripture, and later opening their hearts to him as he broke bread with them.

Recovering hope is a long process. It cannot be microwaved. Despite the joy and excitement of discovering their hope, Jesus, in their lives, it would be awhile before their hope-starved souls to be restored to some kind of balance. He came back to give hope to the hopeless, and life to the life-less. He came back for us as well as them.

So what were these disciples to do with this new found knowledge? Hurry back to Jerusalem while it was still night, though it was not safe to travel at night – or wait until the dawn to shout the good news from the house tops? These two disciples did not do the logical thing. They set out immediately to return to Jerusalem to the others. Only a few hours before they were emotionally and physically drained; and now they were energized, almost flying on the road back to Jerusalem, into the very source of their pain, -- and soon to be the source of their joy as they proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ risen!

What caused this excitement? The new energy filling their hearts, and strengthening their legs, *what was it?* We call it '*hope*'. As long as there is hope, there is life. And with this event, hope was restored, and in time the hope of eternal life would help future generations to be hopeful.

Take note: this was not a hope to be hoarded within oneself.

Like burning coals in a fire pit, hope shared lasts longer and burns brighter when huddled next to other hope-filled souls. That is why the two disciples had to return to Jerusalem, to feed the fire of hope alive in their hearts with the others.

Hope is a force that keeps us all alive in the face of daunting challenges. Anyone who has come close to experiencing hopelessness and/or despair knows that it cannot be manufactured, like some commodity on a shelf begging to be bought. It is not some kind of wishful thinking. *Genuine hope is a gift from God* to which I have to open my heart when life seems hopeless. It is one of the three theological virtues, and like faith and charity, calling us to take that leap beyond what reason tells us. We are called to be persons embodying hope for one another. We have to be each other's partners in hope.

"Partners in hope" – that is who we are -- as we bless the bread and break it in this Eucharist, and share it together this morning, here and wherever we go when leaving here. I am praying we will have our eyes and minds opened, like the two disciples so long ago, and find that hope is alive among us as Christ's body in our time. *Is there one of us here who does not value the presence of hope in the other?* Peter Faber, one of the three founding fathers of the Society, had this prayer to offer. It is a prayer for our continuing, hope-filled journey to our Emmaus and back to Jerusalem. Please join me in your hearts as I conclude this homily.

O Christ Jesus

May your death by my life,

**Your labor my repose,
Your human weakness my strength,
Your confusion my glory.
Amen**