

HOMILY

The Third Sunday of Easter *April 6, 2008*

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There once was a little boy who decided he wanted to find God. He knew it would probably be a long trip, so he decided to take a lunch...four packs of Twinkies and two cans of root beer.

He set out on his journey and went a few blocks until he came to a park. On one of the park benches sat an old woman looking at the pigeons. The little boy sat down beside her and watched the pigeons, too. When he grew hungry, he pulled out some Twinkies. As he ate, he noticed the woman watching him so he offered her one. She accepted it gratefully and smiled at him. He thought she had the most beautiful smile in the world. Wanting to see it again, he opened a can of root beer and offered her the other one. Once again, she smiled that beautiful smile.

For a long time, the two sat on the park bench eating Twinkies, drinking root beer, smiling at each other, and watching the pigeons. Neither said a word. Finally, the little boy realized that it was getting late and he needed to go home. He started to leave, took a few steps, turned back and gave the woman a big hug. Her smile was brighter than ever before.

When he arrived home, his mother noticed that he was happy but strangely quiet. "What did you do today?" she asked. "Oh, I had lunch in the park with God." Before his mother could reply, he added, "You know, she has the most beautiful smile in the world."

Meanwhile, the old woman left the park and returned to her home. Her son noticed something different about her. "What did you do today, Mom?" he asked. "Oh I ate Twinkies and drank root beer with God." And before her son could say anything at all she added, "You know, God's a lot younger than I imagined."

Similarly, in today's Gospel from Luke, two disciples are joined by Jesus as they travel to Emmaus. As they sat down at table and he broke the bread with them, they experienced his real presence and became what they were meant to be—companions. The word “companions” is derived from two Latin words *cum* meaning “with” and *panis* meaning “bread.” Companions are those who share bread together. And through their sharing, they are profoundly bound to one another in faith and fellowship. But till their eyes were opened and their hearts were burning inside them, the disciples had difficulty believing Jesus was with them.

Is there any parallel between the experience of the followers on the road to Emmaus and our lives? There are many times when each of us fails to recognize the presence of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Remember that the Scriptures promise us that Christ is with us—not just as an occasional, miraculous event, but at all times. In Revelation Jesus tells us, *“Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”* So an experience like that of the disciples, who recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread, is always available to us.

However, there's a problem. It's easy, even for dedicated Christians, to put off opening the door to Jesus. We so want to be good Catholics, but when it's more convenient, at least not today. Just wait, we say, until we reach retirement age, or our kids are out of college, or we make the last payment. Then we'll try to put into our lives the kinds of things we would want to do if Jesus were here.

But Jesus is here, right now! And when we open our hearts to other people, particularly those who are different from us, we are opening the door to him. This is a practical way that Christians can take a major step toward realizing the constant presence of Our Savior. He says so specifically, *“Whatsoever you do to one of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it unto me.”*

When we take such a step, our eyes are opened, as were those of the disciples. We expand our lives. We escape from the cages we build around ourselves and enter a new environment of surprises, adventure and satisfaction. This is some of what Cleopas and his brother learned on the way to Emmaus. Imagine their elation and

excitement! I wonder how long it took them to get back to Jerusalem, to share what they had seen and heard with their friends? They might have set a 10,000-meter speed record.

We need to be thankful that the miracle they experienced isn't a mystery or a secret any longer. It's the truth all of us can share. Our Savior lives, and if we let it happen—if we accept his presence—our lives will be changed forever!