

## Homily for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter, Year A

By Fr. Jerome Ituah, OCD

Readings: Acts 2:14, 22-33; Ps 15(16); 1 Pet 1:17-21; Lk 24:13-35

Theme: The Risen Jesus and the Old Testament Law and Prophecies

In our first reading, Peter and the eleven disciples addressed the people of Israel. Peter begins by describing the person of Jesus, who worked so many miracles and signs among them. However, God allowed him by a deliberate choice to be crucified. Peter accuses the people that although they knew the Law, they crucified Jesus outside the Law. They twisted the Law to crucify him. But that was part of the plan of God to fulfil the Scriptures. Peter then highlights that the death and resurrection of Jesus were prophesied in the Psalms through David, which is our Psalm today (Ps 16). We know that David was a king. But Peter addresses David as a prophet because the words he foretold are fulfilled in Jesus. Peter observed that David wrote that his body would rest in safety and that God would not leave his soul among the dead, that is, in Hades, nor let his beloved know decay, that is, bodily corruption. Peter then argues that David died, and his grave is known. Therefore, he could not have been writing about himself. Instead, since David was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn an oath to him to make one of his descendants succeed him on the throne and that descendant was the one whose body would not suffer decay by being raised from the dead. God fulfilled these words of David in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In this way, Peter reinterpreted this Davidic Psalm in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In the second reading, Peter again draws a strong connection between the Old Testament and the life of Jesus, telling his listeners that Jesus paid the ransom through his death on the Cross to free them from the old ways of their ancestors. And through the death of Jesus, we now have faith and hope in God. Peter, therefore, teaches us how to read the New Testament and the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as a fulfilment of the Old Testament.

In the gospel, Jesus opened the Scriptures to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, showing them how he fulfilled the Old Testament in his person. On the way to Emmaus, the two disciples were heartbroken. They were traumatised because of the shameful death of Jesus and the seemingly sudden end of Jesus' ministry, throwing his followers into disarray. These two disciples went away from Jerusalem, the scene of the event and lamented on the way among themselves as they went. Jesus appeared in their midst and began to journey with them to bring them out of their predicament. Unfortunately, they didn't recognise Jesus. Jesus asked them what they were discussing. The two men were surprised that this strange person did not know what had happened in Jerusalem over the past few days. They then expressed their feelings and disappointment, how they had put all their hope and trust in this Jesus because he proved to be from God through the signs and wonders he performed. And how they were disappointed over how he died, dashing their hope of saving Israel, as contained in Scripture. Above all, some women brought the news that they could not see his buried body and had a vision of angels that Jesus was alive. But they had not seen his body. At that point, Jesus confronted them. 'You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets!' He then opened up the scriptures to them, showing them the link between what was written in the Old Testament and his life, death and resurrection. Still, they could not recognise Jesus. They only recognised him at the breaking of bread. The response of the two disciples was, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road while he opened to us the Scriptures?' *Kardia*, the heart as the seat of emotions, could be enthusiastic, agitated, excited, and suffer terribly.

The burning heart could mean different things. It could refer to a person fuming with anger or burning with love for another. It could also mean the heart is profoundly moved or captivated, joyful or deeply hurt. In the case of these disciples, if we read the expression with

what comes before, namely, that Jesus accused them of not believing, then we could say that they were probably accusing themselves of being too slow to understand, that is, their display of ignorance of the Scriptures. In this case, they rebuked themselves for their lack of belief, not recognising him even as he talked to them on the way. However, if we read the burning with what comes after, that is, the recognition of Jesus at the breaking of bread, it could be a moment of excitement and renewed hope for them as Jesus explained everything written about him in the Old Testament to them.

Whenever we read and meditate on the Scripture, God speaks to us, Jesus speaks to us, and it should burn within us. If we are in sin, the Scriptures should convict us of our wrongs and move us to repentance. If joyful, it should increase our excitement and praise and thanksgiving to God. If disappointed, it should re-ignite hope and trust in God. The word of God burns within our hearts ultimately to lead us on the right path and enlighten the eyes of our mind, speaking to us and our situations. When we read and meditate on the Scriptures, we must call on Jesus to teach us and rely on the Holy Spirit to enlighten the eyes of our minds as he did to the two disciples. Otherwise, we may not understand what God wants to communicate to us. With their hearts burning now for the Lord, the men who told Jesus that it was too late to continue his journey went back that same night to Jerusalem. When we burn with love for the scriptures, it leads us into action.