

# HOMILY ~ THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

## APRIL 22/23, 2023

I want to tell you about something that happened many years ago, before I was ordained. I was doing my internship at St. Gemma and St. Christine Parishes in Detroit. Their festival was coming up, and they needed to get a lot of licenses and permits; and they asked me to go with them. They told me that they wanted me to wear my collar because they thought I would have an easier time getting what we needed. I was at the point in seminary where we had to wear a collar at the seminary; but I rarely wore it outside the seminary because it made me look like a priest, and it was just confusing to people. I had to explain why I looked like a priest but was not really a priest. But I wore it that day. When we got downtown, we split up and went to different offices. They wanted me to go to the Penobscot Building. I told them that I knew where that was and started off. Well, when I got to the building that I thought was the Penobscot building, it was not. Now I am lost. This was 20 some years ago, before cell phones and GPS. I stopped and was thinking what am I going to do now, when a homeless man started yelling at me. *“Hey, you, Father, I want to talk to you!”* I knew I should not have worn the collar. I thought just start walking in the other direction, but it was very obvious that he was not going to give up. When he caught up to me, he grabbed my hand and said, *“Hello, Father.”* I started in to my explanation that I looked like a priest but was not a priest, but he was not at all interested in that. He said, *“You look like you are lost. Are you lost?”* I said, *“Yes. I am looking for the Penobscot Building.”* He said, *“You are going in the wrong direction. I will walk with you and show you where it is.”* I thought, great. Then he told me his story. He had just gotten out of prison, and he found Jesus while he was in prison. He told me that Jesus was guiding him, and he was not going to do anything that would send him back to prison. He was having a hard time because no one would hire him with his prison record. He was living in a homeless shelter, and he said, in some ways, this was worse than prison. But he said, *“Jesus has not given up on me, and I am not giving up on him.”* When we got to the Penobscot Building he said, *“God bless you, Father”* and walked off.

In the Gospel Reading, we heard about the Road to Emmaus. It took Cleopas and his companion a long time to recognize Jesus. Why was that? I think once they learned that Jesus died, they were stuck there and were not open to that fact that Jesus was still alive. Why didn't they believe the testimony of the women who said that Jesus was alive? I think I would have at least hung around Jerusalem to see if it was true. Maybe they did not even consider their testimony because they were women. At that time, women were not given much credibility; but Jesus specifically chose the women to give this revelation to. Maybe Jesus knew that while the women were open, the men would not have been able to get past the fact that they knew Jesus died. Jesus met two people that we really know nothing about; it could have been any of us, on the road to Emmaus, which could have been any place. Emmaus is not known for anything; and in fact, we do not even know for sure where it is today other than it is seven miles from Jerusalem. Jesus meets all of us where we are, we certainly do not need to be in a spiritual center.

Jesus does not appear to us today in the way he appeared to the disciples before the Ascension, but he does appear to us through the people in our lives. I wonder how often we miss the presence of Jesus in other people in our lives because of preconceived notions about who they are. Sometimes I think we can get so caught up in our own disappointments, or in our own problems, or the way we think things should be, that we cannot see past that. I do not think my running into that homeless man that day was a coincidence. I think the Jesus in me was able to meet the Jesus in that homeless man. At first, I was not open to him because he was homeless; and I would have escaped if I could have. I never thought that a homeless man could help me. He took me where I needed to go. I never thought I would have a pleasant conversation with him on the way. The man was homeless and had a criminal record; and he had great faith that Jesus would help him, and he would be ok. I am embarrassed to say that I have some doubts myself, and Jesus has blessed me abundantly up until this point in my life. I wonder how many times I have missed encounters with Jesus because of my biases, preconceived notions or because I insisted upon sticking to my plan for the day. How about you?

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim