

**April 6, 2008 -- Third Sunday of Easter**

**Readings: Acts 2:14, 22-28; Psalms 16: 1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11; First Peter 1: 17-21; Luke 24: 13-35**

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- First reading: The apostles explain how God works through human history – even in their betrayal of Jesus.
- Responsorial psalm: You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.
- Second reading: God’s plan to save us in Christ began before the beginning of time.
- Gospel: Even as the apostles turn away from their hopes, God reaches out to them in their journey, in their sorrow and opens their eyes. The ambiguity of God’s action in history is made clear. Finally in the Eucharist they actually feel the presence of Christ with them.

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I arrived in Peru early in 1977 newly ordained, just out of the seminary; still sure of myself since I had not yet realized all that I did not know. I was assigned to the Juli Prelature to work among the Aymara, while I was living with a family and studying Aymara. The men of the community visited me one afternoon with a request that I celebrate a mass the next day. The men, members of a local *campesino* union, were planning to begin a general strike the next day.

At the time Peru was in the midst of a lot of political turmoil. I had a lot of theory about the relationship between religion and politics but no practical experience. We spoke together for over an hour. I made the argument that the strike was political; that it wasn’t right to mix the two different realities. The men were clear; they did not see the distinctions that I was making. They were Catholics; they were struggling for justice and a better life because of their needs and their faith. It was totally natural for them to connect the two. The next day I celebrated the Eucharist in the community chapel. It was clearly a celebration of faith, a celebration of hope and confidence in the God of Life. It was a celebration that strengthened the community in their struggle. I still feel that there are a lot of hidden traps in the relationship between faith and politics but I know that they are related and the Aymara taught me that God works in history, in our needs and struggles.

“Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free.”

Today’s readings emphasize that God is working in history, bringing about change, new life, the fullness of life.

In the first reading we hear the apostles explaining to the people that God was working in Jesus and even in their betrayal of Jesus. In the First Letter of Peter we hear of God’s plan to save us in Christ begun before the beginning of time. In the Gospel we hear about how difficult it was for the disciples to perceive God’s saving action in Jesus, how difficult it was for them to grasp or believe in the Resurrection. The disciples on the road to Emmaus are clear, they had hoped he would be the one to free Israel, apparently he was not. They are leaving the others; they leave Jerusalem and their hopes behind. It is over. They are returning to their former lives. But, even here as they turn away from their hopes, God reaches out to them in their journey, in their sorrow and opens their eyes. The ambiguity of God’s action in history is made clear. Finally in the Eucharist they actually feel the presence of Christ with them.

God continues to act in history today and we still have a difficult time perceiving and understanding God's saving action, discerning God's presence in our midst. Just as the disciples who set out on the road to Emmaus we confuse our own hopes and desires with the sometimes difficult tasks that God asks of us. As we continue to celebrate Easter I believe that there are two points that the Gospel makes that can help us discover and understand God's saving action in our world today. First, on the road to Emmaus Jesus points out how service, selflessness and suffering are central to his mission, central to God's action in the world. I tend to be very practical, to want to see results, to ask, what is in it for me? The Gospel criteria are very different. It is not about what I want but rather what God is calling me to, service and selflessness that have the power to transform both each of us and history. These criteria are important in all that we do, in our prayer, in our work, in our family life and yes, even in our politics.

The second point that today's Gospel makes is that we discover Christ in community, not in isolation. It is in the community formed on the journey, with the stranger that the disciples begin to see Christ and finally in the breaking of the bread, in the Eucharist, that they see Jesus clearly.

What does all of this mean for us today? We know well how torn apart our world is by poverty and wealth, by both good and bad intentions by struggle and wars. Where is God acting today? How do we distinguish between our hopes and God's plan? If we want to be in touch with God's saving action in ourselves and in our world we need to apply the criteria that we discover in today's Gospel in our own lives, in our families in our societies and in our world. What are the movements that are rooted in service rather than self interest? What are the directions growing out of selflessness rather than egocentric greed? That is where we will discover God. We also need to remember that we will only be able to do this in community, in the Church, the body of believers in communion with one another.

God is acting in our lives and in history today bringing about the new person in Christ and the New Creation! As Christians we are called to be in touch with God's Spirit and to open ourselves to the impact of the Spirit in our personal lives, our families, our work and even in our economic and political decisions. It is not about taking care of number one. It is about going beyond our selves, our families and even beyond the borders of our country to help take care of others especially the most vulnerable. It is about selflessness and service. The mission of Jesus is our mission and it is in assuming that mission in the context of everyday life that God is leading us and all of creation to a new fullness.

#### **For more information:**

Read more about economic justice in *Loving Our Neighbor in a Shrinking World*, a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates' policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, are politically disempowered and suffer the consequences of the United States' resistance to support workers overseas.

*[Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:](mailto:maryknoll@maryknoll.org)*  
[www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm](http://www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm)

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