

Father Houlihan's homily from April 26, 2020 (There were audio problems with the live streaming.)

4-26-20/Third Sun. of Easter/Acts 2:14, 22-33/Ps. 16/1 Pet. 1:17-21/Lk. 24:13-35.

The story of the journey of the two disciples on the way to Emmaus is one of the most beautiful of the Easter stories. We are not really sure of the identity of the two disciples, but one of them is named Cleopas, and he may have been an uncle of the Lord. These two men were disciples, not apostles. Disciples are learners, followers, people who study to become like their teacher. The apostles were with Jesus at all times—the disciples may never have seen Jesus, or perhaps only saw Him once. Perhaps they did not even know what He looked like. They had followed Him hoping that He was the Messiah of their dreams—the One Who would make everything perfect. But their hopes were shattered. They shared the Jewish expectation (as well as the expectation of many Christians today) of instant perfection when the Messiah came—no more suffering, no more death, no more injustice, and the resurrection of the dead. But Jesus suffered and died. They had apparently put their money on the wrong horse. They gave up and were returning home, probably wallowing in self-pity. They were so dejected that they could not even look up to see Who this stranger was. If you have ever experienced depression, or talked to someone who was depressed, you know that that person cannot see any good, any beauty, or any joy because of being caught up in his or her own problems. It is a terrible thing to close in on ourselves—to retreat from reality, to whimper, to believe that nobody loves or cares or understands and to think that nothing has meaning. Almost every emotional disturbance is a turning in on oneself. Many of us have constant temptation to do this. Good psychology is good faith—come out of yourself—look up and out—forget yourself. We have to remember that good theology teaches that nobody ever said that this world would be perfect, or that there would be heaven on earth. The Jewish ideas about the Messiah that were wrong (just as the ideas of many Christians today) proceed from the same wishful thinking. Jesus corrected them—there is suffering before glory. He used the Suffering Servant songs of Isaiah (the ones we read during Holy Week), Psalm 22, Psalm 118 (“the stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone”), and the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament)—the Lord raised up! It is a temptation of our fallen human nature to want instant gratification, and instant happiness. When we do not get our way, a mature person accepts it and goes on—he or she renews hope, but there is temptation to go to pieces, to go to the other extreme, thinking that all is worthless. We can become disillusioned with everyone and every institution. Good theology teaches that there must be a cross before a crown. This life will always be a struggle, but Jesus is with us and in us. Nothing can compare to His suffering, and He rose from the dead. We, too, can rise—if we put our faith in Him. The truth is that Jesus is real and that He cares for you. The truth is that you will not have everything your way, but that even setbacks can have meaning in the context of the cross. Offer your successes and failures in union with Him. The truth is that you can come out of your shell. Allow Him to open your mind to the Scriptures, to see beauty and truth even when tempted to turn within yourself. You can recognize Him if you have faith. Get interested in others. Do for others and forget yourself. Ask the Lord for help. He will. The disciples asked Him to stay with them, and even though He vanished from their sight, He did stay with them. Renew the words of the Responsorial Psalm—“Lord, You will show us the path of life”—and the words of the second reading—“Your faith and your hope are centered in God.” Come out, look out, look up—He is with you!