

Homily: 3rd Sunday of Easter: Cycle B: 2021: Acts 3: 13-15, 17-19; Ps 4; 1 Jn 2:1-5: Lk 24:35-48

“Growth in the Joy of the Spiritual Life in the Light of the Jesus’s Resurrection”

What is Christian joy? It is a gift of the Holy Spirit in which we experience the reality of God’s personal love for us as individuals and as a people. The reality of Jesus’s Resurrection in Body and Soul should feel us with great joy! And it should change our lives for the better.

1. **We are called to be witnesses to the Resurrection.** A witness is one who is called to testify that something has really happened. In this case to proclaim the truth about Jesus to all those around us. *How can we do this effectively in all that we say, think, and do in this difficult pandemic time with so much fear and anxiety, interior and exterior? We need to grow ever deeper in our interior union with the Lord because it is only by growing in prayer that we come to know the Lord, on a personal level.* This is wonder of the Catholic spiritual life. **Do we realize there are stages of development in relation to our prayer life?** Have we ever heard about that or thought about that? *(I will do some adult ed classes on that when the pandemic ends).* Just as we grow physically from infancy and childhood to adolescence and then to adulthood, so are we called to develop spiritually. It’s not a one shot deal of accepting God into our lives but an ongoing process. How does this occur? Through the power of the Holy Spirit building upon our efforts to grow. If we are generous with God we will grow in our interior union with God; if we are lackadaisical or indifferent we won’t. **The Easter season is a good time to take a reality check of our spiritual life.** *We are called to go beyond reading our prayers, to meditating on the sacred mysteries of our Faith, to entering into contemplative union with the Lord of Life.* I would recommend a couple of things to read, wherever we are in our spiritual development to help us with this process: the 4th section of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and two little books by Fr. Thomas Dubay, an expert of the Catholic spiritual life: *Prayer Primer* and *Deep Prayer-Deep Conversion* from Ignatius Press. The spiritual journey is the most exciting journey in this life and yet from my experience how few are aware of it, even those of us who come to Mass on a regular basis. We do need to learn more.

2. **When we start to grow spiritually, we become aware of the need to put our faith more into practice in daily life: which is living the new life won for us by Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.** Then our moral choices as Catholics, in daily life, are no longer simply a matter of following the “*rules of the Bible and the Church,*” but are the main tangible way we show our love for God and neighbor and witness to the fact that **Jesus alone** is the Savior of the world and **the Catholic Church is the ark of salvation** for the human race. *If we love the Lord we keep His commandments*, as we hear in the 2nd reading from St. John today. What a privilege to be part of the Community of Faith which Jesus Himself began on the rock of St. Peter the first pope and the other apostles, and continues to guide humanity to this day, through the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Magisterium of the Church and the lived Faith of us all, particularly the saints. **The saints by the way are so important as witnesses because they show us that God can transform the human person completely if we let Him, despite human weaknesses, into the very image of His own love, truth and goodness.** As the French writer Claudel once said “*the only tragedy at the end of our lives is if we are not a saint!*” All the things that we humans tend to focus so much time and energy on: our careers, our relationships, our possessions, our wants and desires - in the end don’t amount to anything if we don’t progress in holiness. The lack of a serious interior life leads to sin and evil and seeing the Catholic moral life as simply a cramp on our style and happiness. Or to put it in the words of one young person, “*Everything is a sin.*”☺ Yes, it can seem that way if we don’t have a deep interior union with the Lord and are just grasping for the passing pleasures of this life. We don’t realize the Lord’s way is the better way until we embrace it; until then we are in a kind of spiritual fog. Once we commit to following the Lord in all areas of our life, the attractiveness of sin is greatly diminished, for we see it for what it is: rebellion against God and against goodness, and truly leading to unhappiness, destruction, and death. We also are filled with **interior joy and peace** which even flows into our exterior life and is shown in a joyful and peaceful countenance as Pope Francis has pointed out in his Apostolic Letter on

holiness (*Gaudete et Exsultate*) - so that when we do sin, it immediately makes us sad, and we develop a desire to go to Confession ASAP, instead of putting it off.

3. **Growth in the interior life leads to a greater self-knowledge.** As we grow in prayer we come to see things in our life that go against the Lord's designs and we sincerely want to change them - since we now know how much He truly loves us! At this point, we will say like the saints: we would rather die than be separated from the Lord, and truly mean it! **The problem of the division between professed faith and lived reality in the lives of so many Christians today is primarily a result of lack of a serious interior life.** If we don't know the Lord on a personal level, what is the basis for wanting to follow Him which involves carrying the Cross and going against the grain of the world, particularly in the area of morality, esp. Catholic sexual morality, e.g., contraception? It's not going to happen! Thus the need to work on our interior life. **Be generous with the Lord:** allow His grace to transform our heart, mind and will. Take time out daily to spend with Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead us into deeper prayer. *Daily Mass, Rosary, the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, meditating on a page of the Bible each day, reading good spiritual books and spending time before the Blessed Sacrament also helps immensely;* come to our Friday 3 p.m. Eucharistic Holy Hour. Additional helps are *a frequent reception of the Sacrament of Confession*, which is like a spiritual tune-up, and *being careful what we read, watch on television, and look at on the internet.* Just as we are called to watch what we eat on a physical level, so that we can maintain good physical health, we are called by God to watch what we consume spiritually so that we don't harm our souls. And, by the way as your pastor, I am willing to help you cultivate a deeper spiritual life if you are interested. Just give me a call or send me an e-mail. It's doesn't have to be that complicated in reality; it just means re-prioritizing our lives on some level and being more disciplined. As St. John Paul II once said as Pope to the Austrian bishops, but it applies to all priests as well, "*Your first duty as pastors is not projects and organizations, but to lead your people into deep intimacy with the Trinity.*" That's what it is all about! Pray I always do that job well. God bless you.