

May 3, 2026
Text: Luke 24:13-35

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

“Seeing is believing.” So the common phrase goes. There’s just one small problem with it, Biblically speaking: it’s totally wrong. God’s word tells us, “Now faith (believing) is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” If you see something, you don’t need to believe it, because it’s right there. It’s when you can’t see something that you need to believe it. That’s what our Gospel text teaches us thing morning. And it teaches that, through the God-given gift of faith, we can “see” things that are even greater than what our eyes behold.

Our Gospel reading takes place on the first Easter Sunday; that’s what St. Luke means when he writes “that very day.” As we know, that’s the day when one of the greatest events in all of history took place: the Resurrection of Jesus. Early that morning, Christ had left the tomb, body and soul, showing Himself the victor in the great conflict that had been raging since Eve took that first bite in the Garden.

The serpent’s head had finally been crushed; he had received a mortal wound from which he will never recover. The power of the grave was broken; it could no longer hold the people of God. The Lord of Life had triumphed over sin, death, and hell, and His victory could never be undone.

But despite this incredible victory and its universe-changing effects, how do we find the followers of Jesus on that day? Far from feeling victorious. Most of them are hiding out of fear. Today, we hear about two of them heading out of Jerusalem. And how are they doing? Downcast. Sad. Hopeless. That hopelessness is especially heard in the voice of a disciple named Cleopas, who laments, “We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.” But those hopes had been dashed, it seemed.

Why does Cleopas think this? Well, as he points out, it was now the third day since Jesus had been crucified and placed in the tomb, and nothing seems to have changed. Three days, and they’re still filled with anxiety and despair. They had hoped, but based on what their eyes see, those hopes had come to nothing.

Now for us, reading about this event roughly two thousand years later, the irony might be almost too much to bear. We know that Cleopas is talking to Jesus! He says to Jesus, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?” Ironic, as Jesus knows perfectly of what has happened! In fact, He’s the only person who fully knows what’s happened!

How is it that one of His disciples doesn’t see who he’s talking to – and somewhat rudely, even? We’re told, “their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.” The two disciples saw Jesus – He wasn’t invisible – but they didn’t recognize Him.

Why were they kept from recognizing Jesus? It seems that Jesus was there to test them, if you will. He wanted to see if they would recognize Him by faith, if they believed His promises to them

about the third day. Coincidentally, in nearly all of Jesus' post-resurrection appearances, He is recognized by faith, not by mere sight.

And what do we see about the faith of these two disciples? It's not good. Consider how they refer to Jesus: "a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." They say He's a man, and a prophet – a mighty one, even – but nothing more. This is certainly a big step backwards.

Think about when Jesus had asked His disciples who people said He was. They reported that the people thought Jesus was just a prophet. But when Jesus had asked, "But who do you say that I am?", Peter, speaking for all the disciples, exclaimed, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!" There's a huge difference between those two answers, one showing what human eyes observed and the other being divinely-revealed truth grasped by faith.

It seems that these disciples' faith had shrunk considerably. And apart from faith, they cannot recognize who is actually walking with them. Without faith, Cleopas speaks of the redemption of Israel as a lost hope, even as he tells this to the One who has already accomplished it through His death and resurrection. Without faith, even the working of God – the report of angels and the empty tomb – aren't able to be grasped or understood.

In the doubts of these two disciples, we can see how our own doubts can obscure our ability to see Christ. The truth of Easter, the victory of Easter, is just as real today as it was then. Jesus is still risen. And even more, He has ascended into heaven and is ruling and reigning over all things for the sake of His Church. Our Lord, our Brother, our Friend, is sitting on the throne of heaven itself. That is reality, and nothing, not even the devil and all the powers of hell, can change it.

So then, do our own lives always reflect this glorious, triumphant reality? Do we seem to live lives of endless joy and victory? Or do we sometimes feel like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus? Do we take the words and promises of Jesus in which we are to hope, and then look at the world around us and think with Cleopas, "We had hoped..."

Maybe we look at our country and its political situation and we wonder why our Lord lets it go on. This is what the disciples were hoping that Israel would be delivered from – the arrogant Romans, and the corrupt Herodians, and the hypocritical Pharisees, and the slimy Sadducees. Or maybe we look at the economy, the price of gas and the receipt from the grocery store going up while the money coming in doesn't, and we think "How long will I be able to afford daily bread, Lord?"

Or maybe you watch loved ones suffer – or endure suffering yourself – and you wonder, "If God could heal all those people in the Bible, why doesn't He do it now?" Maybe you stand at the graveside of a loved one and simply ask, "Why?" In all these things, hopes seem lost, and the devil's temptations and our own sinful flesh obscure Christ and keep us from seeing the truth.

To see the truth, to recognize the presence of our Lord and His working in the world and in our lives, we need faith. That's what the two disciples on the road to Emmaus needed. And so, because He loves them and wants them to truly see Him, Jesus works to restore their faith. The first way in which He does this is through the Scriptures.

After rebuking their unbelief and reminding them of what the Christ came to do, Jesus does this: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.” Jesus goes back to the very beginning and begins teaching, showing how from the start of Genesis to the end of Malachi, it’s all pointing to Him.

He would’ve spoken of the Creation and the Fall, how the God who made the world had promised to come and redeem that world. He would’ve shown how He had promised to come as the offspring of Abraham and bless all nations. He would’ve described how the Suffering Servant of Isaiah clearly pointed to the Christ’s suffering and death and what it brought about. He would’ve pointed out how David prophesied in the Psalms that the Christ would not see the corruption of the grave but would be raised. And much, much more.

As Jesus teaches His disciples through His word, what happens? They later say to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the road, while He opened to us the Scriptures?” Through the word, Jesus fans that smoldering wick of faith in their hearts, causing it to burst into flame once more.

After speaking His word to them, they then invite Him in for supper. But as we see, it turns out not to be their supper. We read, “When He was at table with them, He took bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.” This isn’t speaking of any ordinary meal, with Jesus just happening to be the one who slices the bread and says the table prayer. No, what we have here is Jesus celebrating His Supper – the Lord’s Supper – with them.

Why do I say this? Three reasons. First, the phrase, “the breaking of the bread,” is how St. Luke speaks of the Lord’s Supper in his writing, such as in Acts 2. Second, though this isn’t Jesus’ house, He is the one acting as the host: breaking the bread, blessing it, distributing it. You only do that if it’s your supper. And note that this is what Jesus did when He first instituted His Supper: took bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to His disciples. And third, this event produces a spiritual effect in these disciples. After Jesus had given it to them, what happens? “And their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him.” Unbelief had kept them from truly seeing Him, but when the Lord gives them His Supper, they are able to see, to believe who He is.

This account shows us how the Lord strengthens our faith as well. He speaks His word to us, showing Himself and His love for us throughout all His pages. In the Scriptures, He rebukes our sin and calls us out of complacency. In them, He shows His great power over all things, doing whatever He knows is best for His people. In them, He gives us example after example of His love and faithfulness toward His people, as well as His promises that His love and faithfulness are still here for us today.

In the word, God shows us the paths of righteousness, how we are to walk in the ways that best glorify His name and show His love to our neighbors. In the word, He shows us that our sins have been wiped away by His blood, that we may live in confident hope. In the word, He declares to us His wonderful victory, that He is risen, that He has conquered death, that those who are joined to Him will live with Him forever.

In His word, Jesus tells us that He is with us always, to the very end of the age. This is not just an inspirational quote or the guarantee of warm feelings in our hearts. No, it points us to His Supper, that same meal which He shared with those two disciples and which He has shared with countless Christians all over the world for nearly two thousand years. As with the two, Jesus comes to us, blesses the bread with His almighty word, and in it gives us His actual body.

Can we see this with our physical eyes? No. Without faith, it looks like ordinary bread, just like how Jesus looked to the two disciples like an ordinary guy. But with faith we see that it is Jesus, present with us just as He has promised to be. He comes to forgive our sins and strengthen our faith. He comes to show us that He is with us always, to the very end of the age. He comes to show us that He is the fulfillment of all our God-given hopes.

After revealing Himself to the two, Jesus vanishes from their sight. Do they go back to feeling sad? No! Their joy remains, because, though their eyes can no longer see Him, by faith they know that He is still with them. As Jesus was still with them, He is still with us today.

Do our eyes always see Him? No. But the Almighty God is not dependent on our observation. He is still present with us, speaking His word to teach us, coming to us in His Supper to forgive our sins and strengthen our faith, watching over us each and every day of our lives and providing for all our needs of body and soul. We do not always see Him. But through His gift of faith, we are able to recognize that He is always with us.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!