

HOMILY 3RD SUN EASTER YRA 2017

Back in my seminary days I used to go to Eastern Market a lot on Saturdays. One Saturday I went to the Market to pick up a few things. As I got out of my car, a homeless man approached me for money. I did not give him money, but he continued to walk down the street with me talking. After a few minutes he said: “I know you. You helped me at Crossroads.” I was working as a counselor at Crossroads with homeless and poor people, but I did not recognize him. Then he started to tell me his story and I did remember him. I saw him at Crossroads, and he had come in a month or two before. When I first saw him in the office I thought: “What is he doing here?” Most of our clients were homeless or near homeless. This guy looked like an average middle class young man. He was blonde and had a trendy haircut. He was wearing a polo shirt and Dockers. He did not look like our clients. I asked him why he was there and he said: “I do not have a place to live. I just need for you to pay for a motel for me for a couple of weeks until I get back on my feet.” I told him that I wanted to hear how he got into this situation, and he told me his story over the next 45 minutes. This is what I pieced together. He got a couple of DUIs and lost his license. He had no way to get to work so he lost his job. He did not have a license so he stopped making his car payments and the car was repossessed. His wife got tired of his drug and alcohol use and divorced him. His wife got the house. He had been living in a little motel for quite a while, but was now out of money and out of credit and had no place to live. I told him: “I think maybe you need to go to rehab for your drug and alcohol problem. I can help you get in.” He said: “Oh, the drugs and alcohol are not the problem; it is all of the things that I have happened to me. If I have a place to stay for a few weeks until I find a job and get back on my feet everything will be ok.” I told him: “Well, you have not done that yet. Why do you think you will be able to do it without help now? Why don’t you just talk to a drug and alcohol counselor and see what they think. I may be wrong. I can help you schedule an

appointment.” He said: “No. I do not want to do that. I just need a place to stay.” I said: “We do not have money to pay for motel rooms, but I can get you into a homeless shelter.” He said: “That will be great.” I told him: “homeless shelters are just one step above being on the street. Are you sure you do not want to consider rehab?” He said: “No, I will go to the shelter.” Two months later at Eastern Market he looked terrible. I still did not recognize him physically. After we spoke for a while he said: “I am ready to go for rehab. Will you help me?” And that is what I did. I got him in my car and drove him to the hospital.

In the Gospel reading we hear about one of the post Resurrection appearances. We call this story of the “Road to Emmaus.” I think it would be more appropriate to call it “The Road back to Jerusalem, to Jesus, to their Faith Community.” Emmaus was not their destination. Emmaus was just a little town of no significance. This could be all of our stories. We know nothing about Cleopas and we do not even know the name of his companion. It could be me, it could be you, it could be that homeless man at Eastern Market. We have all walked the road with our hopes dashed. They did not recognize Jesus at first. How did they recognize him? It was not by his physical appearance. I think it is significant that there is nowhere in Scripture where we get a physical description of Jesus. A lot of people knew what Jesus looked like but no one wrote a description. I think it is because it was not important. Sometimes we need to get past physical appearance and superficial things to see Jesus in others. In the Gospel reading Cleopas and his companion recognized Jesus in the Scriptures and in the breaking of the bread, in the Eucharist, in the Mass.

The post resurrection appearances ended with the Ascension. Jesus does not appear to us in that way anymore, but he does appear to us in the people we meet, sometimes through strangers. I did not recognize Jesus at first, but eventually recognized Jesus in that homeless man

that I met that day. The homeless man did not recognize Jesus in me at first, but he eventually did. I am not suggesting that you pick up every homeless person you meet. You have to discern that. I normally do not pick up homeless people and drive them anywhere. But I did not think my meeting him that day was a coincidence. I knew I was supposed to help him. I knew that I would be safe because Jesus was with me. I think we can find Jesus in Scripture and in the Eucharist. I think that is why it is so important that we come to Mass every week. The more we can recognize Jesus in Scripture and in the Eucharist, the more we will be able to recognize him in the people that we meet. What do you think?