



## Who Is in Our Backyard?

A Reflection for the 3rd Sunday of Easter

Acts 2:14, 22-33

1 Peter 1:17-21

John 20:19-31

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Quite often, the polarities and coexistence of opposite extremes in close proximity to one another cause us to stand up and take notice. This past week an article appeared detailing the struggle of homeless families that exists in the backyard of one of the world's more profitable enterprises, Walt Disney World. This situation presents a different twist on what many have come to associate with homeless people and families. This plight in which people find themselves is not the result of not having or wanting a job. It is the result of not being able to provide for basic necessities and application fees, security deposits, the first month's rent, and the like.

These people work and want, perhaps more than anything else, to be self-sufficient. But, they are caught in a circle that will not allow them to achieve that goal. How can people reach a place of happiness or contentment if their basic needs cannot be met and the most minimal of goals be achieved? As we hear in our liturgies during this glorious time of Easter, the early, quickly-evolving church knew right from its inception the wisdom of taking care of one another and assisting with basic needs. Without this base covered, the higher demands of the Gospel contain irrelevant words and the ministry of discipleship gets compromised. In a society where such opulence exists, why are situations as we find in the backyard of Disney still in existence and, worse still, growing?

The Acts of the Apostles gives us such a great glimpse of life in the early church. The significance, meaning, and power of the Resurrection are so unmistakably evident! Our selection [for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter] says it very clearly: "God raised this Jesus; of this we are all witnesses." Do you consider yourself a witness? Does the reality of the Resurrection possess power for you?

Understanding the Resurrection means that I accept a life of "self-emptying" service. Those who need to worry constantly about where they are going to live, how they are going to provide for those they love, or whether they can even survive or succeed, have little energy left for anything else. When we understand the power behind the Resurrection and what it really means to be a witness, then the concerns of those struggling most among us become our own. Regardless of where we live, what is happening in the backyard of Disney World and in countless other places like it in our world needs to become our business.

One of the greatest acts of discipleship that we can do is to help release others from the chains weighing them down so that they can embrace the Gospel and become witnesses too. This is really a powerful potential act of evangelization. The beautiful and poignant Emmaus story found in Luke's Gospel is packed with insight and wisdom. In our life journeys, Jesus is often disguised. He is disguised in the poor, the broken, the prisoner, the vulnerable, and the forgotten. When we take the risk to journey life with one who struggles we can learn one's story, listen to one's hopes, and become attentive to what is happening in and around that person. This occurs in much the same way as it did with the disciples on the road.

The First Letter of Peter clearly states that Jesus ransoms us from our "futile conduct." It is precisely this futile conduct that keeps us blind to the needs of the poor, God's ordering of life, and our real and true destiny. When we open ourselves up to each other and to God, our hearts will indeed begin to burn as we will be touching and witnessing something authentic, real, and true. And, we must respond. We need to listen to the people of our world so that we can begin to understand why we have arrived where we are and how our journey will continue.

When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, if we arrive with open and humble hearts, we will understand its power to orient and direct us to the truth. The Eucharist allows us to see not only the truth about God but the true needs of our brothers and sisters. As believers, we can no longer close our eyes to what is happening in backyards around the world. Open yourself to the power and God will show you the path to life and, when discovered, you will find abounding joy in his presence!

## **PRAYER**

Gracious God,  
We know that your love is infinite and that you care about all areas of our life.  
In this time of economic insecurity, help us to trust that all of our security is in you.  
Keep us mindful that you always have and always will provide for our needs.  
Apart from you we can do nothing.

Merciful God,  
We ask that you give our leaders the wisdom to guide our nation and the world out of the current economic crisis.  
Help us to protect the poor and all those who are struggling during this difficult time.  
Provide for their needs and give them hope.  
Open new opportunities for them and furnish the resources they need to live with dignity.  
Encourage those who have enough to share essential resources with those who lack the necessities of life,  
and to do so with humble, grateful and loving hearts.

We ask this through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

*Prayer During Difficult Economic Times*, © USCCB: <http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/prayers/prayer-during-difficult-economic-times.cfm>.

Note: This reflection was first published in *Connect!*, a weekly on-line reflection resource connecting Sunday readings to current events, published by Liturgical Publications, Inc.  
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