

- In our second reading today St. Peter refers to our life on earth as a sojourn. In other words, our earthly lives are not an end unto themselves, nor will they last forever.
- Rather, our earthly lives are quite temporary, and they are but a precursor to our eternal lives. This is true whether we go to Heaven or we go to hell.
- If we seek God and unite ourselves to Him in this earthly life and remain united with Him at the moment of our death by being in a state of grace, then we will be united with Him throughout eternity in Heaven.
- But if we refuse to be united to God and separate ourselves from Him through mortal sin and persist in that mortal sin at the moment of our death, then we will be eternally separated from God in hell.
- This is what we believe as Christians. These are the stark facts of our salvation or damnation. Yet there's more for us to consider re: our salvation than just these stark facts.
- What we learned last Sunday as we celebrated our Lord's Divine Mercy is that our Lord desires that we all be saved. Our Lord desires that we all be united with Him both in this life and in the life to come, and thus He constantly holds out to us His mercy.
- While whether or not we go to Heaven or to hell depends on us and the choices we make in this life – particularly the choice to be sorry for our sins and confess them – our Lord is not aloof to what we choose.
- He's not an impersonal or uncaring God. No, He's a God Whose heart burns with love for His creatures. While He is a just judge, He has a father's heart.
- Know this, my friends: our Lord wants us. He wants us to choose Him and His will so that we can be united with Him for eternity. And when we sin and turn away from Him, He patiently waits for our repentance so that He might show us His mercy.
- What's most amazing of all is that, those of us who are the greatest of sinners in this life have the greatest claim on our Lord's mercy. More than anyone else, our Lord desires to show His mercy to those who have turned away from Him in the greatest ways.
- Yet while the greatest sinners have the greatest claim on our Lord's mercy, that's not to say that He doesn't favor those who prove themselves His greatest friends.
- For who can be considered a greater friend to Jesus than His Immaculate Mother, and it was to her that was given the greatest of graces any person has ever experienced.
- Not only was she chosen to be the Mother of God and was thereby preserved free from all stain of original sin from the moment of her conception, but because she lived a totally sinless life and was always completely united to His will, Jesus gave her the grace of being assumed body and soul into Heaven when her sojourn on earth came to an end.
- Truly blessed among women, the Virgin Mary now enjoys the highest place in Heaven because she lived the most perfect of lives here on earth.
- We get an indication of both our Lord's favors for His closest friends as well as His extending of mercy to the greatest of sinners in one of the last lines of today's Gospel.
- Today we hear the story of our Lord's appearance to two men on the road to Emmaus. After seeing our Lord and upon returning to Jerusalem, Luke's Gospel states that the 11 apostles confirm the Lord's resurrection to the two men and that the Lord has appeared to Simon Peter.
- The inference that's made here is that our Lord did not appear to all of His apostles at the same time, but that He appeared first to St. Peter.

- St. John Chrysostom says that because St. Peter was the first to profess faith in Jesus' divinity, he deserved to see His resurrection first.
- But St. John Chrysostom also notes that Jesus desired to appear to St. Peter first because Peter had denied Him, and Jesus wanted to console him lest he despair.
- As a true friend, our Lord did not want St. Peter to suffer any longer than necessary for his sins, even though Peter's sins were against Him! Such is our Lord's charity.
- You see our Lord is not a divine accountant, measuring our acts of virtue against our sins to see which is greater. No, He is a divine Lover Whose heart is ever burning for us.
- Ever since I became a Catholic 25 years ago, I've been attracted to images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus because they show our Lord's heart on fire with love for us. And because of this, it's a good image to keep ever before us as a reminder of His ardent love.
- But at the same time, as we consider our Lord's love for us, we must also consider how much we love Him in return.
- One of the little details I love about today's Gospel is the way our Lord responds to an act of charity, of hospitality, by the two men on the way to Emmaus. After walking with them and explaining the Scriptures, they invite our Lord to stay with them for the night.
- And in return our Lord, Who will never be outdone in charity, reveals Himself to them! He shares with them the fire of His own Sacred Heart so that they say, "Were not our hearts burning within us?"
- When we open ourselves to Christ's presence in Sacred Scripture and the Sacraments, most especially in the Eucharist, He makes our hearts to burn with love – just as His heart burns for us.
- In a larger sense, I think today's Gospel is an invitation to walk with Jesus, to know Jesus, to be in relationship with Jesus. This we do by praying, by meditating on His Word, and by receiving the sacraments worthily and with reverence.
- There's no magic formula. If you want to know our Lord better, then read the Scriptures, pray to Him – especially by going to Adoration, and approach Him in the Eucharist reverently and only if you're in a state of grace.
- This weekend we've been celebrating 1st Holy Communion, which is one of the most joyful moments in the life of a Catholic. As a pastor I love to joy on the faces of our children as they receive Jesus for the first time.
- My hope and prayer as I celebrate 1st Communion every year is that our kids never lose their faith in our Lord's true presence in the Eucharist, but that the Eucharist becomes the center of their lives and their greatest consolation.
- May this be true for all of us as well. May we always know and trust in His presence in the Eucharist, and may our hearts always burn within us as we listen to His Word.
- Indeed, may our hearts always burn with love for Him, just as He always burns with love for us. May we know Jesus; may we love Jesus, and when our sojourn in this life is over, may we be united to Jesus for all eternity.