

Father O'Connor's Homily for 19 April 2026  
Third Sunday of Easter-A

Acts of the Apostles 2: 14, 22-33

1 Peter 1: 17-21

Luke 24: 13-35

There is a line in the Mass prayers for the Easter season that makes me smile a bit. It is found in all the Easter Prefaces to the Eucharistic Prayers – that prayer that the priest prays just before we all sing the “Holy, Holy, Holy.” The line is: “Overcome with paschal joy, every land, every people exults in your praise.”

How “overcome with paschal/Easter joy” are you right now? To be honest, I am still not quite “overcome” at this very moment. And it is already the Third Sunday of Easter!

So let's see what we can do about this by looking at today's Gospel, perhaps from a new angle: like putting the pieces of a puzzle together and then being able to see the puzzle-picture with some real depth.

What was the scene? Two disciples were walking the seven-mile journey from Jerusalem to the town of Emmaus. They had suffered the loss of Jesus on Good Friday. It was now Easter Sunday, but they did not yet know that He had risen. And they were grieving.

Who were these two disciples? I came across an explanation, which involves some speculation about some clues in this passage, that offers me a plausible answer to that question.

In this Gospel, Saint Luke says that one of the disciples was “Cleopas,” but he doesn't name the other one. Saint John's Gospel notes that, on Good Friday, “standing by the Cross of Jesus were His mother and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala... and the disciple whom He [Jesus] loved” [Saint John the Apostle]. It is possible that “Clopas” and “Cleopas” were the same person.

We do that all the time with formal and informal names: Jonathan and Jon are the same person, Susan and Sue are the same person.

If “Clopas” and “Cleopas” were the same person, let's see where that takes us.

Both Catholic and Orthodox traditions suggest that Clopas, or Cleopas, was the younger brother of Saint Joseph, the husband of Mary and the foster-father of Jesus. That would make Clopas. or Cleopas, Mary's

brother-in-law. This would explain why “Mary, the wife of Clopas” was standing by the Cross. She was trying to comfort her sister-in-law, Mary the mother of Jesus.

This sheds light on who the other disciple on the road to Emmaus with Cleopas might have been: perhaps it was Mary, the wife of Clopas or Cleopas.

We might then believe that Cleopas and his wife, Mary, were close family to Joseph and his wife, Mary, and that this relationship continued after Joseph’s death. Since Cleopas and his wife, Mary, lived only seven miles from Jerusalem in the town of Emmaus, they would have traveled to Jerusalem for the Jewish feasts, especially for Passover. And since they were family, Mary the mother of Jesus, might have stayed with them.

Perhaps Cleopas and his wife, Mary, were there in Jerusalem for the week before Jesus’ crucifixion. They might have watched Jesus ride a donkey in that great procession on Palm Sunday. Maybe they even spread palm branches on the ground.

They would have been there, too, when Jesus was arrested and crucified. Cleopas probably watched from some distance, as did all the men except for John the Apostle. But his wife, Mary, was by the cross with her sister-in-law, Mary the mother of Jesus, and with Mary of Magdala.

Cleopas and his wife would have observed the Sabbath in Jerusalem from Good Friday evening until Holy Saturday evening. Then on Easter Sunday they headed for their home in Emmaus. Cleopas had been away for a week, and it was time for him to get back to work.

Before they left, they heard that some women had gone to Jesus’ tomb and could not find His body. The women reported a vision of angels who announced that Jesus was alive.

Cleopas and Mary were discussing all this when a Man caught up with them and walked with them. This Man went on to interpret for them what referred to the Messiah in all the Scriptures.

When they arrived in Emmaus, Cleopas and Mary invited the Man to stay with them in their home since it was nearly evening. Mary hurried to prepare dinner. When they sat down, the Man took bread, said a blessing, broke the bread and gave it to them. At that, their eyes were opened and they recognized that He was Jesus. And He vanished from their sight.

So Cleopas and Mary hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the Apostles what had happened, and how they had recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

This is a warm family and extended-family look at this Gospel, that tries to answer who these two people walking on the road to Emmaus might have been.

They heard Jesus explain the Scriptures to them and they came to recognize Him “in the breaking of the Bread.” “Overcome with paschal joy,” they hurried back to their faith community in Jerusalem to share the good news of Jesus’ resurrection.

And a lesson for us? Recognized or unrecognized, Jesus is always walking with us on our life-journeys, just like He walked with them. So even now in our trials and in our losses, we can still be “overcome with paschal joy” – or maybe not entirely “overcome” just yet, but certainly “on the way.”