

Sermon for the Third Sunday after Easter | 2026
By Fr. Hayden A. Butler

Three weeks into Easter, it can seem strange that the Gospel Lesson returns us to the night that Christ was betrayed. Stranger still are His words to the disciples gathered at the Last Supper, words that by extension are offered to us today: “A little while and you will not see Me; and again, a little while, and you will see Me, because I go to the Father.” These words can sound cryptic to us, but that is because in English we have the verb “see” to translate two different senses of vision expressed in Greek. The first use of “see” refers to the disciples' attempt to observe Jesus to the end of figuring out what He is doing. The second use of “see” refers to perceptive understanding, of knowing Jesus in a new and clearer way that was not available to them before. “A little while and you will not observe Me; and again, a little while, and you will understand Me, because I go to the Father.”

At the time He taught them, Jesus spoke about their experience of Maundy Thursday through Easter Day. In a little while, Jesus would be taken away from them to trial and judgment, and they would not be able to observe Him. After a little while longer, they would see Jesus again in a new light as the risen Christ. The Resurrection narratives track this transformed vision. On Easter Day, none of the disciples recognized Jesus at first. They were only able to “see” the Risen Christ after He gave them the gift of sight, enabling them to understand. And even after that gift of understanding was bestowed, it took time for them to ‘put on’ that understanding as a transformed way of life.

On the basis of this exercise in trust and expectation, the next horizon of our Lord’s words was the Ascension. Having seen how He kept His promise that they would see Him again after the grim experience of the Cross, the Lord prepared His disciples for His ascent to take His throne at His Father’s right hand. Again, for a little while they would not see Him, and again in a little while they would see Him. Yet this ‘not seeing’ would not mean His absence. Though their eyes did not detect Him, even so they would know Him, understanding that He was ordering all things toward the Resurrection, and that He meant what He said when He promised that He was with them always, even unto the end of the age. Their faithfulness to Him would mean going out to make disciples, teaching them all that Christ had commanded, to exercise their vocations in the power of the Spirit who makes Christ present wherever that Spirit dwells.

The Lord’s words to the disciples are the same words He has for us as we continue the work of the apostles in our own generations. For a little while, we do not see Him, and yet, while not seeing Him, we still know Him. We behold Him through the eyes of His apostles in the testimony of the Gospels and Epistles. We behold Him as the Spirit makes Him present in the Blessed Sacrament, as Bread and Wine are made His Body and Blood that we receive faithfully with thanksgiving. We behold Him as our hearts and minds are changed from within, no longer

conformed to the anxiety and murderous expedience of the world, but transformed to mirror the integrity of Christ, who did not curse His enemies, but suffered patiently, seeing beyond His own suffering the love of His Father, the power and the glory of total self-donation to His Father's mission.

We behold Him in one another, often more clearly than we behold Him in ourselves. For the Spirit, whom the Father sends through His Son to comfort us, provides His comfort far more often through the words and works and presence of another than He does through a private visitation solely within ourselves. The Spirit gives us the strength of God, but almost always for the sake of bearing another's burdens with them, giving us just enough strength for the humility we need to let them carry ours with us in the power given to them. If we try to see how all of this works *before* we entrust ourselves to the work, we will likely never go beyond the surface of what God is actually doing in our lives. But if we act with faithfulness even while seeking understanding, then we will begin to see our Lord faithfully working for our sakes.

In the end, much of our salvation is in being delivered from a so-called self-sufficient vision of life in which we stand aloof from God and others, self-protecting and self-preserving. Only then can we be delivered into a vision of life from within, known as we are known in loving communion. What the world perceives from without as a small and constantly losing band of disciples following a crucified rabbi from a backwater town in 1st Century Judea is, when known from within, the vaulted halls of God's own house, the banquet of eternal life richly arrayed, attended by the royal priesthood of the new creation, the archangels over the furthest stars, and the Lord God Almighty Himself, kingly and jolly in their midst. For just a little while, we do not see, but then in a little while, all there will be is that sight. In the meantime, as the risen Lord said to St. Thomas: "Blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed."