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Friday of the 3rd Week of Easter

Date: Friday, May 9, 2025 | **Season:** Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Acts 9:1–20
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 117:1bc, 2 | **Response:** Mark 16:15
Gospel Acclamation: John 6:56
Gospel Reading: John 6:52–59
Preached at: the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House **in the** Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia**.**

There are moments in history when everything changes in an instant. A soldier lowers his sword and chooses mercy over violence. A scientist makes a discovery that redefines how we see the universe. A leader stands before the world and declares that freedom will not perish. White smoke appears, and we have a new Pope. Today, we hear of one such moment—a man, breathing threats and violence, riding toward Damascus with fire in his heart and chains in his hands, is thrown from his horse by a light that shatters the darkness.

Saul was not looking for God. He was not searching for truth, nor was he struggling with doubt. No, he was certain—righteous in his anger, zealous in his pursuit, unwavering in his mission to destroy the followers of this crucified carpenter. And yet, in the blinding flash of divine love, certainty gives way to revelation, zeal is redirected into mission, and the hunter of Christians becomes the herald of Christ.

Imagine the terror of Ananias when the Lord calls him to go and lay hands on Saul. “Lord, I have heard from many about this man,” he protests, “how much evil he has done to your saints.” But the response is as astonishing as it is unrelenting: “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine.” How often do we, like Ananias, hesitate when God calls us to show mercy, to trust in the possibility of change, to see in an enemy the potential of a saint? This moment is not just the transformation of Saul; it is also the transformation of Ananias—from fear to faith, from doubt to discipleship. And he calls him brother. “Brother Saul, receive your sight.”

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It is a story of conversion, but perhaps not in the way we usually think. Saul does not convert from one religion to another—he still worships the God of Israel, still clings to the Scriptures, still sees himself as part of God's covenant people. What changes is not his faith but his vision. Scales fall from his eyes, and he sees anew. And this is our story too. Conversion is not a one-time event, a single dramatic turning point. It is the ongoing process of learning to see as God sees. To look at the world, at one another, and even at our enemies, through the lens of divine mercy.

In the Gospel, we find another moment of resistance—another confrontation between certainty and revelation. Jesus stands before the crowds and proclaims that he is the living bread come down from heaven, that unless they eat his flesh and drink his blood, they will have no life within them. The response is scandal, confusion, rejection. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" they ask. And yet Jesus does not soften his words or retreat into metaphor. He presses forward, speaking not of symbolic nourishment, but of real, transformative communion: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

This teaching is hard. It was hard for them, and it is hard for many today. The Eucharist stands as a sign of contradiction, just as Christ himself did. In ages past, it was a doctrine so controversial that laws were passed requiring Catholics to deny it to hold public office. In our own time, it is often dismissed as superstition, reduced to a mere symbol. But we do not gather here for symbols. We do not kneel before bread and wine as though they were nothing more than signs. We come because we believe that in the Eucharist, Christ is truly present—body, blood, soul, and divinity. We believe that the same voice that called Saul from his blindness now calls us to his altar, to receive not just an idea, but a Person. Not just sustenance, but salvation.

And what does this mean for us? If Christ has given himself so fully to us, how can we hold anything back? If he has poured out his life for the world, how can we withhold our own lives from those who hunger and thirst for justice, for mercy, for hope? Saul's conversion was not an escape from the world but a commissioning into it. To eat this bread and drink this cup is to be sent—to the poor, to the oppressed, to the abandoned. To Zambia, where too many wake up to the ache of hunger and the fear of tomorrow. To our communities, where divisions harden like scales over our eyes. To our hearts, where Christ still knocks, still calls, still asks, "Why are you persecuting me?"

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If the Eucharist sends and sustains us on mission—to the wounded, the hungry, the fearful—then leadership in the Church must do the same. And so we give thanks for the election of Pope Leo the Fourteenth, who now takes up the ministry of Peter as a builder of bridges—between peoples, nations, and hearts. In a world torn by conflict and hardened by division, we pray that his pontificate will be marked by peace, dialogue, and a deep conviction that God's love excludes no one. Here in Zambia, where the need for unity, reconciliation, and servant leadership runs deep, we join the whole Church in praying that Pope Leo XIV may help us walk more faithfully the path of Christ: a path of compassion, justice, and enduring hope.

And so, as we continue in this Easter season, let us ask ourselves:

- Where in my life is God asking me to see differently? To let the scales fall from my eyes and recognize his presence where I least expect it?
- How does my reception of the Eucharist transform my daily actions? If I truly believe that Christ dwells within me, how do I carry that presence into the world?
- Like Ananias, where is the Lord calling me to go beyond my fear—to trust in the power of his grace to change even the hardest of hearts?

May we, like Saul, be knocked from our certainties.
May we, like Ananias, find the courage to call the unexpected ones our brothers.
And may we, with hearts made new, rise and go where Christ sends us—
to bear his name before the nations,
to bring his love to a world in need,
and to proclaim with our lives: "He is risen indeed!"

Let us pray for our new Holy Father:

God of mercy and love,
you have chosen Pope Leo the Fourteenth
to shepherd your Church in these times.
Grant him the wisdom of your Spirit,
the courage of the apostles,
and the tenderness of Christ.
May he be a bridge-builder in a divided world,
a voice of peace amid conflict,

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and a sign of your boundless love for every person.
Bless him in his ministry,
and bless us, the people he now serves,
that together we may walk the path of your Kingdom,
in justice, in joy, and in hope.
Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.