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The Third Sunday of Easter (B)

"Lord, let your face shine on us" (Psalm 4:7).

With these words the Psalmist expresses the primordial longing of every human heart to see God. Can this desire be fulfilled? Is it possible for us to see God? Yes, it is possible, because he has shown himself to us.

The disciples first followed Jesus when he said to them, "Follow me," because they were seeking the face of God (Matthew 4:19). Little did they know that when they looked upon Jesus they looked upon the face of God. If we have not come here today seeking the face of God, I do not know why we have come.

The human longing to see the face of God "recognizes God as a person, a being concerned about us, who hears and sees us, speaks to us, and can love us and be angry at us - as the God who is above all and yet still has a face."¹ It is the recognition of a relationship that we long to have with him and he with us.

It is a bold request we make today with the Psalmist, asking to see the face of God, a request that even Moses was refused.

¹ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *On the Way to Jesus Christ*, Michael J. Miller, trans. (San Francisco, California: Ignatius Press, 2004), 20.

Moses said to God, "I beg you, show me your glory" (Exodus 33:18). The Lord answered his request, saying, "I will make my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim my name "The LORD"... But...you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live" (Exodus 33:19-20).

As he passed by, the Lord said, "I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen" (Exodus 33:22-23). So great is the Lord's love for us that he shields us from the light of his face that burns whatever is not pure.

And yet, is this not precisely what we want, to pull back the veil, as it were, to see his glory, to see God as he really is, face to face? For this reason the Psalmist sings, "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God" (Psalm 42:2)?

To look upon the face of God is to experience absolute and perfect happiness, for he is Goodness, Beauty and Truth. To see his face is to look upon "the Author of life" (Acts 3:11).

Every member of the Church must live his or her life as one "in love with Christ, attracted by him and determined to make [his or her] own life a continuous quest for his Holy Face."²

² Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 1 September 2006.

Is this not, ultimately, what Saint Peter means when he says, "Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away" (Acts 3:19)?

Saint Peter knew well the face of Christ, having lived with him for three years, and he knew well the grace of repentance. After having thrice denied knowing him, "Jesus turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord...and wept bitterly" (Luke 22:61-62). What did he see in that face?

When Peter, at that moment, looked into the eyes of Jesus, he knew that, as Saint John says, "He is expiation for our sins, and not for our sins only but for those of the whole world" (I John 2:2).

In that moment, Peter must have begun to realize - if only in an impartial way - the words Jesus said only the night before: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Is this not why we so often seek to hide from Jesus? We do not want to acknowledge our sins. We do not want to weep bitterly. Yet it was precisely this that Saint Peter found necessary to follow Jesus faithfully and receive his peace. For this reason he says to us, "Repent, and be converted!"

The Lord let his countenance - the light of his face - shine upon Peter and he knew the forgiveness of Jesus, the mercy for which the Lord would soon die to give to him (cf. Psalm

4:7). This is why the Risen Savior stood today in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you" (John 24:37). If we seek his face he will let the light of his face shine upon us, too, and he will say to us, "Peace be with you."

The disciples stood before him "startled and terrified" because - although their sins were forgiven - they knew how greatly their sins had offended God and how greatly they had failed him (Luke 24:38). Even so, they did not hide from his face, but looked upon it in love and fear, and thus, contemplating his face they knew peace.

My brothers and sisters, each of us must seek his face. King David tells us that the "generation" who seeks "the face of the God of Jacob" lives rightly (Psalm 24:6). Who is the one who seeks his face? It is "he who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully" (Psalm 24:3-4). In short, the one who seeks his face keeps his commandments and "the love of God is perfected in him" (I John 2:5). We could say, "seeing happens through a manner of living that we call following after."³

This afternoon I was driving back to Effingham from a track meet in Robinson. I have never been very good with directions. I recognized little of my surroundings as I drove away from

³ Ratzinger, 16.

Robinson, so I asked my passengers, "Are we on the right road?" They assured me we were.

This is a good question, is it not? It presupposes that we know the destination. Are we, my friends, on the right road? Are we on the way that leads to the face of God, to the satisfaction of the deepest longing of every heart? Have we set ourselves firmly behind Jesus Christ?

"This is the path of Christ, the way of total love that overcomes death" that leads to the light of his face.⁴ (Moses)

When the Lord turns his face toward us, he puts gladness into our hearts (cf. Psalm 4:8). For this reason, the Psalmist sings, "As soon as I lie down, I fall peacefully asleep, for you alone, O Lord, bring security to my dwelling" (Psalm 4:9).

He speaks here not of the common sleep, but of the sleep of death. He knows that the Lord will answer his deepest longing, that having sought the face of God he will behold it.

The lives of the saints "assure us that if we follow this path, the way of love, with fidelity, we too, with the Psalmist, will be satisfied with God's presence."⁵ Let us, too, seek his face. Amen!

⁴ Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 1 September 2006.

⁵ *Ibid.*