

26 Third Sunday of Easter Year A April 30, 2017
Acts 2:14,22-28 Psalm 16 1Peter 1:17-21 Luke 24:13-35

The Gospel of St. Luke alone describe this particular incident of Jesus coming to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Of all the Resurrection appearances of Christ, maybe we can relate to this one most easily because the Emmaus story is really our story. Picture yourself walking along the road when Jesus came walking beside the two disciples.

The journey the disciples were making to Emmaus can be seen to symbolize the journey of faith that all of us are on. Sometimes we will experience darkness, and we may have a sense that God has abandoned us. At other times, however, we are able to see clearly how God has been with us, supporting us and guiding us.

Reading the Scriptures, joining the community here at Mass, and seeking spiritual support from others are all key ways to help us make sense of the journey we are on, a journey of faith. It's not just about how these things help us personally, it is about recognizing Christ in our midst.

St. Luke notes that the name of one of the disciples is Cleopas. He does not tell us the name of the other one. These two followers of Christ do not appear anywhere else in any of the Gospels. We do not hear about them before or after this incident. Our lack of knowledge about them is an important detail. Here the scene shifts from the major figures of the Gospel like Peter, John, Mary Magdalene and Thomas, to two ordinary people like us, and Jesus comes to them.

We are just like those disciples, all of us who gather here on Sundays to fulfill our Sacred Tradition of hearing the Word of God and celebrating the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass together. The point of the Emmaus story is that our risen Christ is near to all of us because we are all important to Him. As St. Peter says in the Second Reading, we were all ransomed by "the precious Blood of Christ."

These two disciples to whom Jesus came were not in Jerusalem, nor in the upper room, nor even near the garden tomb. They were on an ordinary road, traveling to a small village a few miles from Jerusalem, the location of which not even certain anymore.

The Emmaus story teaches us that the risen Christ can join us wherever we are. The “*where*” of the Emmaus story is a nameless road, really any road, every road where we are, any point on the road of life as a child, teenager, young adult, single person, separated parent, widow, parent or senior citizen. It is anywhere in the world of work, community, school, whatever our occupation. It is anywhere we are personally, in doubt, in grief, in joy, in worry, in distress. Christ is there with us. That’s the “*where*” of the Emmaus story. The road on which they travelled is our road right now and Christ is on it with us as well.

Evidently, these two disciples did not see the empty tomb and did not believe the reports they had heard. Our way of coming to know Jesus is in the “breaking of the bread.” The Sacrifice of the Mass, the reflection on the Scriptures and Holy Eucharist is how most of us come to know our Lord. We do not have visions, we do not see the nail prints, we do not hear our name called by the voice of Christ. We come to know our Lord as we enter into the Mass, in the Sacred Scriptures, and in the Holy Eucharist, as we gather to do what Jesus told us, “Do this in memory of Me.” Here is where we recognize our Lord is with us.

Indeed, in receiving the Holy Eucharist, we know that Jesus is *really present with us, but how present are we to Him?* As we walk up to partake of the Holy Eucharist, are we fully aware of what we doing and receiving? Most of us have done so hundreds, perhaps thousands of times in our lives. Because of familiarity, we may be distracted or lose focus. Yet, in this very moment of receiving the Eucharist, it is Jesus whom we meet. Can we bring our attention back to full awareness of the gift that we receive?

As powerful as the Emmaus story is, its value for us lies in these simple questions: How do we walk with Jesus today? When do we feel the closeness to our risen Lord that those two disciples experienced? The message of the Emmaus Gospel is that whoever you are, wherever you are in life, the risen Lord is near you. We come to recognize His presence in the “breaking of the bread,” in the Mass throughout our life.

That is why it is so important to stay close to the Mass in difficult times as well as in good times. We come to the Mass at weddings, at funerals, at Christmas and at Easter, in ordinary times and extraordinary times. Here our eyes are opened and we realize that our Lord is really with us all the time, all along the way.

The story of our risen Lord walking along the road to Emmaus reads like our Sunday Eucharistic celebration. The four necessary elements for our Eucharist celebration are similar. First is the gathering or assembling of God's people. Second is the lesson we learn from listening to the Liturgy of the Word. Third is the sharing of the Eucharistic meal, or the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Fourth is the commissioning or the sending forth when the Mass is ended.

When we come together for Mass on Sunday, our church becomes our Emmaus and here we hear the voice of Christ speaking to us. Through the Mass we are drawn closer to Jesus to live a more Christ-like way of life. Every time we attend Mass, Jesus is speaking to us as the Word of God is proclaimed. And like the two disciples, may we say, "were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us. . . , while He was opening the Scriptures to us?"

It is God's grace for us to be challenged through the homily. And before we go back home, Jesus feeds us with the Bread of Life, His Body and Blood, to sustain us, and to nourish us. Let us rejoice that Jesus always walks with us, helping us in whatever ways we need Him.

In this magnificent Easter appearance, on the road to that small town called Emmaus, our risen Saviour shows those two disciples where He could always be found, that is, in the "breaking of the bread." And here in the Mass that we are celebrating together now, we will find Jesus in the "breaking of the bread."

At the beginning of the Emmaus story, the two disciples were walking away from Jerusalem. After their encounter with Jesus and receiving the 'Bread of Life," they *rush* back to Jerusalem to tell the Apostles they have seen the risen Lord. And now we must also go back to our own community to tell the good news of the risen Christ.

As we leave after Mass today, we who are the people who have met Jesus at the door, who have received the fire of God's Word in our hearts and have partaken of the spiritual food Jesus offers us in Holy Communion, are now sent forth to "love and serve the Lord" and proclaim the Good News of our risen Lord. The Eucharistic celebration has now become the experience of our own journey to Emmaus, our own personal encounter with Jesus.