

26th April 2020 (3rd Sunday of Easter, Year A)

Acts 2:14,22-33; Psalm 15(16):1-2,5,7-11; 1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35.

'They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem.'

As we listen to the gospel story today and reflect on this narration, we are invited to join these two disciples on their journey to Emmaus.

The disciples had been in Jerusalem with Jesus. They had followed him, listened to his teachings, and had hoped he was going to be the one to save them from the Romans, their political oppressors. They were probably ready to call him Lord and Master, but they had not really understood what the journey of the Messiah was meant to be. Disappointed at the happenings in Jerusalem, they turn their backs onto the city and walk away from it. They travel to a location seven miles away from the city.

Absorbed in their frustration and anger, they do not recognise Jesus who joins them and walks with them. Even though they had not understood anything, Jesus enters their frustration and anger and talks to them. Last week we saw Jesus walk through the closed doors of the place where the disciples were gathered, today he walks through the thick walls of anger and frustration.

Even after a two-hour talk about scripture with Jesus explaining how scriptures actually spoke about what had happened to him, these two men, unlike the women who had reported that Jesus was alive, still could not recognise this stranger walking with them.

Things change when they insist on the stranger to stay the night with them. It was getting too late to continue on his journey! Jesus accepts the offer and this is when Jesus finally reveals himself at the breaking of the bread, a term that clearly refers to the Eucharist.

The reality of the community, the Church as People of God, is a very important element in our journey of faith. If the two disciples had not reached out to the stranger on the road and insisted with him to stay the night with them, they would not have got to see Jesus! They would have missed out on a great opportunity. The best way to meet Jesus face to face is to see him in our sisters and brothers. While it is important to listen to his word and participate when the bread is broken, it is the poor around us who place us in touch with God: 'I was homeless and you sheltered me!'

When they recognised Jesus, the two disciples could no longer stay away from the community, they ran back immediately to Jerusalem to share the news with the other disciples. When we really discover Jesus, we cannot keep the news to ourselves but we feel compelled to share this experience with the community we are journeying with. This is the beginning of the Church.

At this time when our Church buildings are closed and we cannot come together to celebrate as a community of love and a community of faith, we are given this gospel story to reflect about. Some of us feel disappointed that at the moment we cannot attend Church. Perhaps one question we need to ask ourselves at this time of absence from Church is: what does it really mean to me? Why do I actually go to Church?

Like the story in today's gospel, the life of the community of the Church, the People of God and the Body of Christ is a pilgrim journey. At times we may be frustrated and disappointed about things that happen in life, perhaps even about the way things happen in the institution of the church, and we try to 'walk away' from it all, at other times we come running to share our good news. As Baptised and believers in Christ, we are always part of a People of God and a Community of Faith. We can never cut ourselves from the Body of Christ. Christ himself told us that he is where two or three are gathered in his name.

If I have really and truly been introduced and come to know the person of Jesus, then I cannot stay away from the place where the community gathers. I have to share and form part of a family of believers. The Church is the house of our Father where all sisters and brothers gather to celebrate our faith together. The Eucharist is a banquet, a meal, a celebration. In order to recognise Jesus, I

need to be able to open myself to welcome the stranger, the needy and the lonely among us. If I keep myself isolated from everyone else, I cannot claim to have recognised Jesus.

The apostle Paul warns against receiving the Body and Blood of Christ inappropriately (1Cor 10:27). If I partake of the Eucharist without reaching out and sharing the joy of my faith with my sisters and brothers, then I too would be sharing the Body and Blood in an inappropriate manner. The Eucharist is a food that unites us and brings us together as one family and one Body in Christ.

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