

Easter III
4/23/2023

OUR TRAVELING COMPANION

They left in sadness. This was the end, the end of the end. They were going away from Jerusalem, away from the believing community. The fact that Jesus was killed clearly demonstrated that he was *not* the messiah and while many Jews believed in the resurrection, they held it was to come at the end of time and not *in* the present time.

A stranger approaches and asks what they're talking about. They're downcast and surprised. *Don't you know about all the things? What kind of things? The things that had to do with Jesus of Nazareth.* As I tell our students, grammar is important. Pay attention to the grammar because people express themselves by what they say. *We were hoping.* Cleopas uses the past tense. They were hoping but they're not hoping anymore. It's over. It's done. They are without hope. They are hopeless.

The stranger upbraids them but then walks with them. He accompanies them and explains the scriptures to them. The risen Christ explains not only that there could be a suffering messiah but that it was necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory? What follows is the greatest scriptural lesson of all time as Jesus explains the scriptures to them and how they relate to him. It's been said that Jesus is both the interpreter of the scriptures and the message of the scriptures as well as the key to understanding them. And they start to understand. Their hearts begin to burn within them. They see him but they don't recognize him.

After a long walk they invite the mysterious stranger to stay with them. Here he truly becomes a companion to them, literally, one with whom one shares bread. When he breaks the bread, they not only see him but recognize him. The Eucharist has been called, *the privileged place of encounter with the Lord; it is the "source and summit" of the whole Christian life.* Here, Jesus feeds us not only with his word but with his Body and Blood, with his whole self under the form of bread and wine. Something some of our young parishioners will receive for the first time today. When we worthily receive him we can say with St. Paul, *It is no longer I who live but Christ*

who lives in me. Jesus may have disappeared in bodily form but he continues to be present in the Eucharist, really present.

What they do after that is very important. They turn around. The accompaniment of Jesus is meant to lead us to conversion. They hit the road once again but this time they move toward Jerusalem, toward the believing community. They share how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. Explaining the word of God was important but it was in the breaking of the bread that they recognized him. It's been said that in the Eucharist, Jesus isn't only with us but also *within* us. Word and sacrament form two pillars of the Christian life and we're called to love and cherish both. They left despondent and *hopeless* but returned joyful and *hopeful*. What was thought to be the end, was in fact the beginning.

This isn't just a nice story. In this story we find out who we are. At times, we can find ourselves discouraged, low on hope or perhaps even hopeless and despondent. We can be tempted to move away from the communion of believers, from the Church. Staying close to Word and Sacrament can point us in the right direction; allowing Jesus to feed us in Eucharist can lead us to ongoing conversion. Put yourself in the position of that unnamed companion to listen to Jesus in his word and see him in the Eucharist.

What the Emmaus disciples did is what we are doing right now and what we do at every celebration of Mass. We come together, perhaps a bit tired and worn down. We listen to the word of God. In prayer we speak to God. In his and in the sacraments, God speaks to us. Then Jesus reveals himself to us in the breaking of the bread. Finally, like the Emmaus disciples we turn around, refreshed once more head toward the true Jerusalem.

And so in this story we also find out what we are to do. If we stop and look, there are Emmaus experiences in our own lives. There are times when after the fact we see how Christ was present to us; maybe in someone we met or someone in need, perhaps in a given conversation. Times when we can see there was something holy going on where Jesus was present. Sometimes we call this a God moment. We could also call it an Emmaus moment.

Like Jesus, we're called to accompany people to take them where they are. This involves listening to them. If people feel listened to, it's more likely that they

will listen to us. But also in one way or another, perhaps over time, to lead them to Christ. To help them turn around. It's been said that God loves us just the way we are and he does but God also loves us too much to just leave us there. Jesus is our traveling companion not away from but towards Jerusalem.

With lives of intentional faith, may our hearts always burn for God's word and our souls hunger for Jesus truly present in the Eucharist. If we feel despondent and hopeless may Jesus, our traveling companion, fill us with joy and make us hopeful. Sometimes, what seems like the end may actually be the beginning.