

HOMILY EASTER SUNDAY 03-A

“The Road To Emmaus”

(Acts 2:14, 22b-28; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35)

Have you ever experienced or lived a gospel?

The Eucharist is meant to be lived.

Liturgy is meant to meet life. The liturgy that we are celebrating right now is doing just that. We are experiencing this gospel right now. How, you ask? Allow me to explain.

The whole story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus parallels in a beautiful way the celebration of the Eucharist. First, we began this liturgy by gathering together as a worshipping community. In the gospel, Jesus joins the disciples as they walk together, forming a little community of three.

Next in our liturgy, we celebrated the penitential rite in which we ponder our concerns and confess our sinfulness to each other, and to God who listens to us. In the gospel the disciples are downcast and share their heaviness with Jesus, who listens to them.

Then, in the liturgy of the Word, we proclaim God’s Word and break it open through the homily, which is happening at this moment. In the gospel, Jesus explains to the disciples all that the prophets had said about him.

Finally, in our liturgy today, in the actual Eucharistic action itself (the taking, blessing, breaking and sharing of the bread) we recognize him. In the Gospel, the disciples recognized him when he repeated the actions of the Last Supper for them, and vanished from their sight, leaving only the bread, blessed and broken, on the table.

The only part that remains now is for us to leave the Church after this celebration with our hearts burning within us, eager to share with our families, friends and all we meet, the Good News that Jesus is risen and that we can experience him in our lives, here and now, in just as real a way as the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The Eucharistic actions are meant to be lived – we are taken, broken, blessed and now we must be shared.

Let’s look at this gospel more closely. The two men (or perhaps a married couple) are not leaders but represent all the followers of Jesus. What they learned from Jesus is what we also must learn.

The New Interpreter’s Bible states that the suffering of the Messiah was necessary in God’s providential plan for the redemption of Israel and the salvation of sinners. It was necessary that Jesus should be about his father’s business; that he free the crippled from bondage; that he stay with Zaccheus, and that he go to Jerusalem to suffer and die to fulfil the scriptures.

That fulfilment, however, consists not only in the suffering of Jesus, but also in his entering into

glory. Both the resurrection and the ascension are his entry into glory – the evangelists do not separate the two. At the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus in his glory, and spoke of his departure in Jerusalem; now the risen Lord appears and explains how his suffering and entry into glory fulfilled Moses and the prophets.

Christ is the fulfilment to which all the Scriptures point. Jesus makes to go on, to show that theologically, he never forces himself upon anyone. Faith must always be a spontaneous, voluntary response to God's grace. Then the guest becomes the host. Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them - the four verbs are Jesus' signature, which the disciples may remember from the feeding of the five thousand.

Jesus did not celebrate the Eucharist in Emmaus but every meal has the potential of being an event in which hospitality and table fellowship can become sacred occasions. The Eucharistic language further implies that the Church experiences the continuing presence of the risen Lord when it gathers at the Lord's Table.

Later believers may not have the opportunity to experience an appearance of Jesus, but they can see him clearly in Moses and the prophets and know that he is present when they share their bread with a stranger or gather for the Lord's Supper. The appearance experience, therefore, is no spiritual Camelot locked in the past but a sign of the ways in which the risen Lord continues to be present with his disciples.

Luke has found that he recognizes "the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed" when memory of the actions and teachings of Jesus' ministry are enlightened by the Scriptures and re-enacted in the hospitality and table fellowship of the community of believers. The risen Lord was made known to them in the interpretation of the Scriptures and the breaking of the bread.

Flor McCarthy, SDB, shares a poignant story about this gospel. There is a painting in a museum by the Dutch painter, Rembrandt, of Jesus sitting at table between the two disciples. The painting tries to capture the rapturous joy on the faces of the disciples at the moment when they recognized Jesus. A guide would explain that painting to visitors by telling the story behind it, the story we just heard, in a routine kind of way. Then his wife got cancer and died a slow, agonizing death. He could see absolutely no meaning in her terrible suffering and untimely death. It was as if the world had come to an end for him. Nevertheless, he was persuaded to go back to work at the museum. Once again he found himself telling the story, only more mechanically than before. Then one day something clicked inside him, and suddenly he realized that the story was not just about those two forlorn disciples but about him too. Like the two disciples, he was going down a sad and lonely road. Even though he was a believer, regrettably, up to that point Jesus had been little more than a shadowy figure who lived only in the pages of the Gospels. But now Jesus came alive for him. He felt his presence at his side, the presence of a friend who knew all about human suffering. "It was as if my eyes were opened and I saw things differently," he told a friend. "My heart began to burn within me. As I went on telling the story, a healing process was at work inside me. Even though at times I'm still fragile, I have begun to hope and live again."

Here are some salient points for our reflection on this gospel:

1. The Risen Lord meets us on the way to our own Emmaus, the place where we go to escape when life becomes too much for us.
2. The disciples recognize and meet the risen Lord in the act of sharing bread with a stranger.
3. God's presence is always fleeting, elusive, on the edge of our awareness and perception, in the past as well as in the present.
4. The experience of the Risen Lord is never for us alone, but is meant for the community, to build community.
5. Easter is not over at sundown, but stretches into the rest of our lives.

The Eucharist we celebrate today can truly be for us an Emmaus walk; an experience of the Risen Lord through gathering, proclaiming the Word of God and the breaking of the bread. Let us pray that we can now "go back to our own Jerusalem's", hearts burning with the fire of God's love shared with us and needing to be shared with the world.

So remember, the Eucharist is meant to be lived. Let us live it to the full.