

## EASTER SUNDAY III "A"

APRIL 26, 2020

The Easter gospels of the past two Sundays and today have taken on a relevance for me unlike any other time in my life. Rather than seeing them as accounts of events of long ago, I find myself personally present in them, not just on a theological or spiritual level, but on a personal level as well. Entering into these accounts through the persons and situations described I find my own feelings, doubts, fears, expressed as well encountering the Risen Jesus offering me healing, hope and peace.

The story of the encounter between Jesus, Cleopas and his unnamed companion on the road to Emmaus and their eventual coming (or better returning) to faith is perhaps with the encounter of Jesus and Mary Magdalene outside the tomb on Easter morning the most beloved of Easter stories. St. Luke included this incident for a very specific reason. St. Luke and the church to which he addressed his gospel lived some forty years after the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Luke and his community were Gentiles. None were eyewitnesses to the events he relates. Referenced by St. Paul as one of his traveling companions, scripture scholars speculate that Luke relates the message of Jesus as he received it through the preaching of the apostle. Pious tradition speculates that Jesus' mother Mary may have related the stories surrounding Jesus' birth to Luke, and that Luke personally painted the first icon of Mary. The Emmaus story addresses the question Luke's church found itself wrestling with--since they were not present for the events related by the original eyewitnesses, how were they to know the truth of Jesus' resurrection? It's a relevant question for us as well.

As today's Gospel opens we find Cleopas and his companion on Easter evening walking away from Jerusalem. This detail is important. Having been followers of Jesus and witnessing the events of Good Friday, they were now experiencing the dashing of their hopes and dreams. The one in whom they had placed their faith was dead. Their experience is not unlike many now who, in the face of the COVID19 pandemic, find our own faith in God, the Gospel message, the

life of the Church severely tested. Where is God now? Has my faith in Jesus been misplaced? Perhaps it's time to walk away, to give up.

It is precisely in this moment of "crisis" as the disciples and we walk on the journey of life that "the stranger" suddenly appears and joins us as a fellow traveler. Unknown to Cleopas and his companion, and perhaps to us, Jesus joins in the journey. Jesus does not stop the Emmaus travelers, or us, from voicing their and our questions, grief, doubts, and yes, perhaps their anger over all that has happened to them and us. From this we need to learn that it is okay to be radically honest in bringing to Jesus all that is on our hearts; everything.

Not denying or criticizing their situation, Jesus proceeds to reveal the ways to know his presence in life's journey, especially in these days. First, Luke tells us that Jesus opens hearts to the truth of the Scriptures. In these days, I again urge all of us in our personal and family situations to consider spending time alone or as a family together daily reading and reflecting on Scripture. Consider using the Gospel passage assigned daily which you can find listed in the online or printed copy of the Bulletin. After slowing reading it spend some time in silence Ask yourself, what word or images struck me? Spend some time with that word or image. What message through it is Jesus offering me? How can I put this word into practice in some way in my life today?

After awakening their hearts to his presence in Scripture Jesus opened the disciples' eyes to recognize him in the "Breaking of the Bread" an early church name for the Holy Eucharist. While the present situation prevents us from physically partaking in Holy Communion I invite you to continue participating in our livestream broadcasts of Mass and making a Spiritual Communion. Personally invite Jesus to come into your life until such time, God willing soon, we can all be together again to celebrate Mass.

On our Emmaus journey today, Jesus walks with us assuring us of his continued presence with us in Word and Sacrament so that, like Luke and his church, we who have not seen can believe.