

Third Sunday of Easter - Year A

Dear Friends,

The Risen Lord seems to have been very busy on the day of his Resurrection! According to the gospels, Jesus appeared to Simon Peter, to Mary Magdalene, to the apostles gathered in the upper room (as we heard last Sunday), and to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. There is also an ancient tradition that Jesus appeared to his Blessed Mother Mary, probably before everyone else.

There should be something very familiar about the encounter of Jesus with the disciples on the road which we just heard in today's Gospel. Jesus walks with the disciples, he explains the scriptures to them; he sits down at table with them, and then, "he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them."

That last sentence in particular should be very familiar ... it is repeated at every Mass almost word for word in the Institution Narrative of the Eucharistic Prayer. The overall structure of this gospel account has come down to us in the structure of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Word (the reading and explanation of the Scriptures) followed by the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

We are told by the disciples that their hearts were "burning within them" as Jesus explained the Scriptures. And seated at table with him, they recognize Jesus in the "Breaking of Bread" (what we today refer to as the Eucharist). Because of his Resurrection Jesus was able to be truly present to the disciples on the road.

During this time when we find ourselves in the midst of a pandemic and are being ordered to stay at home for the safety of all health workers and those who must leave their homes to provide essential services, I know that it is heart-breaking to not be able to participate in the Holy Mass in person. It saddens me to not have all of you gathered around the altar to celebrate the Eucharist.

But we must make this sacrifice as long as it is necessary. Today we are invited to unite our feelings with those of the two disciples of Jesus who felt the frustration, uncertainty, and great sadness following the passion and death of their Lord ... and their friend. As they were struggling with the apparent "absence" and "loss" of the presence of Jesus, we too are experiencing something very dear to us that is missing from our lives: our ability to gather as a family of faith and receive Jesus in Holy Communion.

But Jesus is present among us. Jesus is walking beside us. As we are being invited to recognize his presence with us during these strange times, we can share all of the "things" we are feeling and experiencing, and allow him to "break open" the burdens that we are carrying in the light of the Scriptures and of our faith in a loving Father who never abandons his children.

These Scriptures reveal to us again and again that the Paschal Mystery is the pattern of existence: life comes through death; tragedy and difficulties are part of the natural rhythm of God's creation. And so, we can't wish them away. Growth always comes through struggle.

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God took on flesh in Jesus who experienced the depths of human suffering, thus assuring us that "nothing can separate us" from the presence of Divine Love. As Jesus tells the two disciples in today's Gospel, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" St. Peter reminds us in today's second reading that we "have been ransomed, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious Blood of Christ." God is completely committed to us and calls us to be completely committed to the Divine Life we receive through Jesus.

But this Life is not just for ourselves. Once the disciples on the road to Emmaus recognized the presence of the Risen Lord in the Breaking of the Bread, they returned to the community of Christ's followers in Jerusalem, and shared with them the Good News of their encounter with Jesus. Like St. Peter in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles, we too are called to "proclaim the death of the Lord and profess his resurrection," even in the midst of the current health crisis ... especially in the midst of the current health crisis.

God bless you and keep you safe!

Fr. Peter