

Third Sunday of Easter - 2020
Mass Suspended due to Coronavirus
On-Line Homily
Acts 2.14,22-23///1 Peter 1.17-21///Luke 24.13-35

→Today's Gospel episode is the familiar tale of the Emmaus story. In it we hear about two of the disciples walking on the road to the village of Emmaus, some 7 miles away from Jerusalem.

→Luke tells the story with both detail and suspense, of Cleopas and his companion making their way as the sun is setting on that first Easter night.

→As they take one step after another, with heavy hearts, a stranger comes alongside "*talking, walking and discussing with them,*" all the events that had taken place over the past few days.

→As Luke writes, "*it is Jesus himself but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.*"

→Now that one tiny detail has always been puzzling: *how could these disciples not have recognized the Lord?*...the one who multiplied the bread and fish, healed the sick, and held so many people in the grip of his teachings and stories.

→What was it about **this** journey that kept them from seeing the stranger who traveled alongside them?

→And perhaps more challenging, is that could we, who consider ourselves, "*people of faith*" also be as blind and, at times, not recognize the Lord when he joins us in our lives?

→We might laugh and chuckle and maybe even wonder, because we are pretty certain that God **will always recognize us** no matter what; but this story awakens us to the opposite reality that, even though God always recognizes us, might we sometimes fail to recognize God even when he's walking right beside us!

→When you consider it more closely, each one of us has our own Emmaus road that we walk, our own Emmaus journey we often take.

→In other words, we all cope by having some “*place*” to escape to when life becomes too difficult.

→It may be in a park or woods; a movie or a hobby; or spending time with a good friend.

→Emmaus was the place for the two disciples to escape to.

→They could no longer deal with the traumatic events that had just happened in Jerusalem, along with the stories of an empty tomb and angelic visions. It became just too much for Cleopas and his companion to bear; they needed a place to escape and so they headed towards Emmaus.

→Given the circumstances we are facing, perhaps all of us, in some way, are also looking for an escape...an escape from our stress, anxiety, fear, and uncertainty.

→We have all felt discouraged at some point in life; some have walked away from the Church and God, others from relationships and commitments.

→Whatever the case may be, wouldn't it be interesting if a stranger started walking along with us, giving us a chance to talk about what we are feeling and then explained why things happened as they did?

→This is what happens today to the disciples and same thing happens to us each time we gather to celebrate the Eucharist.

→One of the unique parallels of this story is that it is often seen as a model for the Mass.

→It opens as the disciples journey to Emmaus.

→Jesus was considered to be the hope for all people, he was then killed, and now there are rumors that he is risen.

→The story proceeds to say that, "*beginning with Moses and the prophets he interprets for them all of Scripture.*" This is a clear connection to the beginning of Mass, the readings of Scripture and the breaking open of the Word.

→Next Jesus sits down at the table.

→The bread is blessed, broken and given to them. The travelers then recognize Christ present in their midst – a direct association to the Eucharistic Prayer and Communion we share.

→However, what might not be so evident is that this story, not only reveals the structure of the Mass, but it also tells us something very important about the meaning of why we gather each week.

→What happened to the disciples on their way to Emmaus was not ultimately what they had hoped for. In other words, they didn't end up escaping as they had planned!

→Rather through Word and Meal, they confront that which they sought to escape and return to Jerusalem renewed and invigorated by the encounter with the Lord... "*were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us.*"

→This is an important point to understand...because all too often we look at Mass or our prayer as a place to "*get away from it all...to have a moment of peace and quiet...to leave everything in our lives behind...*"

→However just the opposite is true....

→the Eucharist and our prayer is not a place where we go to **escape**, but rather the Eucharist and our prayer is **the place** where we bring all of life to: triumphs and tragedies, hopes and fears, grace and sin.

→It is through the Eucharist and our prayer that life gains perspective: the Word we hear, the forgiveness we encounter, the lessons we learn, and the food we share.

→And perhaps that is why being absent from the Eucharist has been so difficult over these past few weeks.

→There has been no place for us to bring our life too. We are still walking to Emmaus waiting for the opportunity to return to Church and proclaim the Lord to one another.

→Yet we still know that while Christ cannot be sacramentally present with us right now, he is present in his Word proclaimed and when we gather in prayer at home.

→It has been speculated that Emmaus is the place we go to when hope dies, when the pain is too great, when our faith cannot imagine a new future any more.

→But if Emmaus is where we go when hope dies, the resurrection is the story that brings us back.

→Jesus did not join Cleopas and his friend because of their despair, but rather to rescue them from it.

→In the silent compassion of listening, in the unfolding of the insights from scripture, and finally in the breaking of the bread they recognized Jesus!

→Having recognized him, these two washed-up disciples found new wind in their sails, new fire in their hearts, and new strength in their souls.

→Don't you imagine the trip **back** seemed much shorter than the long trek **to**?

→Hope is that way. It puts wings on our feet, smiles in our hearts and sends us back to life, with all its mess and uncertainty, believing still in the future that God brings to us.

→For the disciples and for us...to receive the "*new blessing*" longed for, we have to let go of the "*old blessing*" of what once was.

→In other words,

...if we seemed stuck in Emmaus today...

...we need to remember and remind ourselves that the Risen Lord is closer
than we think.