

In today's Gospel, we encounter two disciples as they are journeying towards the little town of Emmaus to flee the chaos of Jerusalem. Along the way, they encounter Jesus but "their eyes were prevented from recognizing him." As they journeyed with Jesus, they shared the way that their lives had just been irrevocably changed and the hopes and fears that came with that. Jesus then unlocked the Scriptures for them and began explaining the way that God had been working invisibly in their midst. Their hearts began to burn within their chests, but it was only when they encountered Jesus in the breaking of the bread that they finally recognized Him for who He was. Then, with their hearts once again filled with faith, they returned to Jerusalem to share their joy with their community.

In these days, we ourselves are on a journey to Emmaus. Like these two disciples, we too are trying to flee the chaos of the world with hearts filled with hopes and fears. Like these two disciples, we are facing many sufferings one of which is the inability to worship together as a community. As I continued to reflect on all of this, it struck me that like these two disciples, perhaps our eyes too are being prevented from recognizing that Christ is on this journey with us. It is far too easy for us to look at everything going on around us, the collapse of the economy... the social distancing... the shuttering of churches... to look at all of these things going on around us and think that God has abandoned us. What is much harder to sometimes believe is that God is actually walking this journey with us even though our eyes are for some reason being prevented from seeing Him.

When the disciples encountered Jesus, they were fleeing Jerusalem. In other words, they had given up and were abandoning their community and were going back to their old lives. Jesus used their journey to Emmaus, however, to open their eyes to see Him in new ways... to discover Him in Scripture and see Him in the

breaking of the bread, but also to discover the importance of community in their lives of faith. This last point is often easily overlooked in today's Scripture.

It would be far too easy for us to give up during these days as well, to say that enough is enough, to stop trying to practice our faith and go back to our old lives. And yet, these days can become sources of grace for each and every single one of us if we will let them. If instead of giving up, we instead dive in deeper, then God can use this time to help us encounter Him in new ways as well.

In these days when we cannot gather as a community, we should take time to dive deeply into the Scriptures, both individually and as families. This is the first way that Christ began revealing Himself to His disciples, and it is one of the first ways that He can begin to reveal His plan to us in these times as well. God has given us a roadmap to true joy and salvation in the Scriptures, but sadly we rarely take time to delve into this plan for our lives. In these days when we are searching for ways to occupy our time, there is no better time to begin reading the Scriptures with Christ by our side. If we do this, then God can use this time to unlock the Scriptures for us so that we can discover Him in a new and powerful way through them.

This time away from the Eucharist, as hard as it is, can also become a great moment of grace for us as well. It is easy for all of us, myself included, to become complacent and blind to the great mystery and gift of the Eucharist in our lives. How many times in the past would we receive the Eucharist as if it was merely a piece of bread... as if it actually had no meaning or importance in our lives. Right now, however, as we experience this Eucharistic fast, God can use this time to deepen our desire for the Eucharist and open our eyes ever more deeply to the great gift and mystery of the Eucharist. Our separation from the Eucharist can help us to better realize its true importance in our lives and the great absence that occurs when it is gone.

I think that God is also using this time to strengthen our understanding of the importance of community. We live in an increasingly individualistic society, so much so that it is not uncommon to hear people ask why belonging to a church or organized religion is important. I think that one of the great graces of this time of fasting from community is that it has begun to help us once again desire to belong to a faith community and the great value that comes with that. This has been made apparent to me more and more as I celebrate the Eucharist for everyone by myself at a distance. Despite the great joy that comes with being able to celebrate the Eucharist, it also has become very clear that the Eucharist is not something that is meant to be celebrated as individuals but instead within a community. It is meant to be something that draws us together as a community into the one Body of Christ. Perhaps this is why the first thing the disciples did after encountering Jesus in the breaking of the bread was run back to Jerusalem to be with their community.

As difficult as this journey to Emmaus might be, I truly believe that God is using these continued days of fast to allow our desire for Him to grow within our hearts so that we might begin to encounter Him in new ways in our lives. Like those first disciples, our hearts too can begin to burn within us as He purifies our desires and allows us to recognize Him more powerfully in the Scriptures and the Eucharist and even in our own faith communities. My heartfelt prayer is that when this fast ends and we finally arrive at Emmaus on that day when we are joined together as a community once again, we will finally recognize Christ and all that He has done for us during these days as He unlocks the Scriptures and breaks the bread before us.