

The Third Sunday of Easter

‘They recognised him at the Breaking of Bread’.

How often do events change the way we see and live life? Rather like the death of Osama Bin Laden. A time of uncertainty follows his death this week because nobody knows how his supporters will respond. The death of one person changes the way we see the world. At this time we hold the world’s search for peace in our prayer.

It is the same with our own experience of life. Falling in love, a death, a new job or losing the old one, passing or failing an exam, can make us see the past or the future in a new and different way.

As they walked along the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, Cleopas and possibly his wife, had no idea who Jesus was or how the unfolding events of that afternoon would change the way they saw things. They were disciples of Jesus who were downcast and confused following the death of Jesus. Luke tells us that as they walked along in conversation with this stranger, who would later turn out to be Jesus, their hearts burned within them. His presence and word was guiding them to truth and understanding and the warm grip on their emotions was something they would come to understand as he took the bread, gave thanks and broke it. The one whose story and whose words had warmed their hearts was the one they recognised in the breaking of bread. Jesus, in whose company they had enjoyed table fellowship, who has given bread and wine as his body and blood at that last Passover Meal, who had suffered the pain and indignity of the cross, was now present with them in this Easter Eucharist.

That particular experience of Jesus came to an end as Jesus vanished from their sight. Later they would come to appreciate that the risen Jesus, whom they had recognised at the breaking of bread, which we know as the Mass or the Eucharist, was always present with them. Whenever they loved and extended the hand of compassion or healing he was active and continuing his work of bringing human wholeness. The Lord’s disciples continued to recognise Jesus in the breaking of bread and to draw life and sustenance from it. The rest of the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles describes that growth which everyone knew to be due to the Lord’s presence and action in the gift of his Holy Spirit.

The experience of the two disciples, who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus, continues in us and in all those who recognise his presence in the Eucharist. The two disciples who failed to recognise Jesus, came to recognize him once their faith had grown through his presence, their pondering his message, his teaching and the gift of the Eucharist. Life would never be the same again for them because of their new faith and recognition of his intervention in their lives.

The journey to Emmaus is a reminder that life is itself is a journey. Given to us is this experience of space, time and love so that we might grow in our ability to recognise the presence of the Lord in our lives. A recognition which will enable to us to see his presence and be able to see life and its experiences in a new way through the eyes of faith.

If the experience of those two disciples continues in us, how do we ensure that our minds and hearts are making a full and cooperative response, knowing as we do that it is so easy to be blind and hard-hearted and fail to cooperate with the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

St. Luke tells us that as they walked along, the two disciples talked together about all that had happened. This was before Jesus caught up with them. Like anyone else they were talking about the momentous events of the past few days, the events of Jesus death, burial and empty tomb.

In their case they were discussing the Easter story but the Luke makes a point of saying that they **talked about what had happened**. If life is a journey with and into God then it follows that to reflect and discuss with gratitude the events of life is significant in itself. Every moment of life will reveal some aspect of God's love and relationship with us and that is why the person of faith must reflect upon the events of life with gratitude and possibly in conversation with another. It is how we draw our lives into the story of Jesus' work of salvation.

As he caught up with the two disciples, Jesus asked them to tell them what they were discussing, which they did. This speaks to us of the importance of prayer and of bringing the stories of our lives into the flow of our daily prayer. It could be by pondering them in our hearts as Mary did, or simply by giving thanks for them and considering how well we responded in love and gratitude to the opportunities and relationships that God constantly gives us.

'You foolish people! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets.' They had got so far and no further in their development of their faith and their ability to see the truth. Now it was time for them to listen to Jesus and allow him to bring them to a deeper understanding and an ability to see the bigger picture. That will happen to us if we listen..Listen to the gift of each other; listen to the Lord speaking to our hearts in prayer and listen to his life giving word in the Sacred Scripture, especially during the celebration of Mass. It is this experience of the revealed word of God and the deep and changing life of prayer which will bring us to see life and its challenges in a constantly new way.

Their experience of life and prayer, of his word and the scriptures brought them to the high point of the whole journey which was the recognition of Jesus in the breaking of bread. This was the event which was at the heart of the resurrection for them. That in this meal Jesus was absolutely present giving himself in perfect love. Today's story stands at the beginning of the Christian family's journey through time with the celebration of the Lord's resurrection in the Eucharist being the heart that pumps life and new creation into the gathered group of the Lord's disciples and the world itself.

In that evening Eucharistic meal the disciples were drawn into the life and risen body of Jesus who is God. They were caught up in that eternal love which God is and, we are told, at that instant they returned to Jerusalem and proclaimed 'Yes it is true, the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon'. As we commit ourselves to this weekly Eucharistic celebration we too must go our into the world and proclaim the resurrection of Jesus as the only truth that matters.