

23 April 2023, The 3rd Sunday of Easter: Luke 24:13-35

The two travelers did not recognize him. Much is sometimes made of this: some speculate Luke's comment, *...their eyes were kept from recognizing him...* (v 16), implies a divinely imposed blindness. Others think that they could not conceive a dead person coming back to life and unconsciously blocked recognition. Some think Jesus disguised himself, which seems ludicrous. I prefer a spiritual cause. They had gotten so wrapped up in the tragedy, drama, and injustice, they became blind to the meaning and reality of it all. Everyone likes a good story. We can live vicariously through the hardships and misfortunes of others. Empathy is a virtue, but empathy can degenerate into fantasy—the trials of others can become a false identity for oneself, or at least a diversion from our own troubles. The travelers could not see the who and why, being seduced by the what, when, where, and how.

This spiritual angle gives Jesus' two responses context. Cleopas and friend focused on the events and not on what they reveal. They ask, *...are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there...* (18). Ironically, they are ignorant: they know only facts without meaning. They refer to Jesus as *...a prophet mighty in deed and word...* (19b). They could not see that in Jesus God's purpose goes beyond preconceived categories. They are skeptical of the first report of Jesus' resurrection, likely because male disciples did not have the *vision of angels who said that he was alive* (23b). Society did not accept women as credible witnesses. The travelers' fixation on lurid details, the assumption God is confined by their expectations, devaluing others' experience blinded them to Jesus' presence with them.

In response, Jesus does two things. First, *...beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures* (27). This was not an encyclopedic, roadside Bible study. Jesus gave them the framework and perspective so they could see the Truth revealed in what happened. Jesus' incarnation, teaching, healings, passion, cross, death, and resurrection are not mere shocking episodes nor baffling enigmas. Jesus is the will of God in the flesh—God's truth, God's work, God's astounding love, incarnated and bestowing divine life. God's salvation in Jesus is from the beginning, always present.

The second thing Jesus did: *When he was at table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight* (30-31). Earlier in the Gospel Luke wrote that on the night Jesus was betrayed *...he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me"* (Luke 22:19; cf. Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22). Matthew and Mark have essentially the same wording of the Last Supper. Through the gift of the Holy Eucharist—a simple meal—we celebrate and are visibly and spiritually assured of Christ's presence, much more seen, known, and enjoyed in commonplace, ordinary, familiar life than in the extraordinary and spectacular. Jesus is ever-present, not revealed on high but in our midst, not with fanfare but in humility, not to overwhelm but to indwell and empower for service. In the Blessed Sacrament, Jesus is present. The Lord of the Universe, in whom the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, through whom God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself (Colossians 1:19-20a), wants to be held in your outstretched hand, to be consumed, so you become what he is (I John 3:2c). We need not search for Christ. Jesus is already with us—through the Scriptures testifying to him, in the Holy Eucharist and all the Sacraments. We need simply open our eyes, our hearts.

One more thing: Cleopas and friend immediately returned to share their experience of Jesus with other disciples. This is what Christians desperately need right now: the spiritual desire to share Jesus' presence and grace with one another, so each one is blessed and grows in Christ, so each is a blessing to others. As is written in Hebrews: *And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching* (10:24-25). Jesus is the ever-presence of God; Jesus teaches and strengthens us through the Scriptures; Jesus indwells and nourishes us in the Sacrament; Jesus calls us into His Body, the Church, to grow in faith and charity, to be a Christ-blessing for others.

Blessed, praised, hallowed, worshiped, and adored be our Lord Jesus Christ: on his throne of glory in heaven, in the most holy Sacrament of the Altar, and in the hearts of his faithful people. Amen.