

Third Sunday of Easter

We are learning a lot about communicating with each other during this time of the corona pandemic. We are missing some of the old ways of sharing time with each other while learning new ways to connect. But there is nothing like the opportunity to sit at table with someone and to share a story over a good meal and some fine wine. We could say that this is what we are missing as a Church Community when we are unable to gather around the table of the Eucharist.

Today's gospel helps us to reflect upon what we can still do well and heightens our awareness of what we long to be able to do again. We could say that there are at least three levels on which our gospel story is being told. The first level is the story that Luke writes for us. We meet these two very disillusioned disciples who are heading away from Jerusalem on Easter Sunday afternoon. We walk with them. They are joined by a person that they cannot recognise. Luke tells us that it is Jesus himself. He asks the question, "What matters are you discussing as you walk along?" The Greek word "homileo" is used to describe their discussing. It is the same word that describes what I am meant to be doing now with you. I am not called to give you a sermon, but I am called to give you a homily. I am meant to break open the Word of God in a way that you

can relate to it; so that you and what is happening in your life right now can enter into discussion with it.

The answer to the question that Jesus asks becomes the second level of the story. Cleopas and his companion tell their story of who they have understood Jesus to be. We are not told who that companion is, but we should not be surprised in Luke's gospel if it is a woman, perhaps the wife of Cleopas. They state quite clearly that Jesus was a great prophet. They speak about what happened to him at the hands of the religious leaders. They reveal their own hopes about Jesus. "Our hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free." They then describe the resurrection without truly believing it.

Jesus then picks up the third level of the story. "Then starting Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself." Jesus was breaking open the scriptures for these disciples so that those scriptures could give some meaning to all that they had experienced in these days.

All of this comes together at the moment when Jesus breaks bread with them. It is only then that they recognise Jesus. It is a moment of recognition for us too. If you like it is the fourth level of the story. It is the

level that we come to when we realize that Jesus is only truly revealed to us when we sit at table with him. It is only when we gather as his disciples to celebrate his death and resurrection that we can truly hear his word to us. This is what we are missing. Yes, we can join in the Eucharist by praying along with a Mass that is being live screened or recorded for us. But it is harder for us to be really connected with that celebration when we are not praying beside the people of faith who usually share the pews with us. Jesus is present in a very particular way in the Word proclaimed to us when we gather as his disciples. It is here that we understand the Scriptures best. We cannot understand God's Word fully by ourselves as isolated individuals.

We have chosen to include in our weekly bulletins a reminder of the pathways that we need to follow if we are to be the kind of Parish that God asks us to be. One of the pathways of renewal is that the Word of God is proclaimed in good preaching and faithful lives. You cannot do much about the good preaching, but we can all do something about preparing our hearts for the Word of God that is offered to us.

How are we accessing that Word now? Do we carefully listen to that Word as it is proclaimed at the Masses on the web or TV? Do we read the Sunday Scripture Readings on our parish bulletin? Have we found a

podcast of the Word proclaimed and then broken open for us? "Audio Divina" is one such podcast. Do we sit with the Word with the help of "The Word Among Us" or "The Madonna"? Have we downloaded "Pray as You Go" so that we can pray with the daily Scripture Readings? Do we share with our own families what we have heard the Scriptures saying to us?

Our Parish Website has many links to the kind of resources that can help us to listen well to the Scriptures. While we may not be able to gather to hear the Word proclaimed in our churches, we can still hear that Word in many wonderful ways. Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus when we realize who is speaking to us we can say with them, "Did not our hearts burn with us as He talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?"

Those two disciples could no longer keep walking away from Jerusalem. They had to return to the place where their faith in Jesus was grounded. They had to gather again with others who shared that faith and to tell them what happened to them on the road and how they had recognised Jesus at the breaking of the bread. May we recognise Jesus this week as he breaks open his Word for us and prepares our hearts to be united with him again at the table of the Eucharist.