

Third Sunday of Easter

I have just had the privileged opportunity to spend a week away on retreat. I made my retreat at Sevenhill, a place where people have gathered for prayer and study for nearly one hundred and seventy years. Retreats are a time when we stop and listen to the stories that Jesus might want to tell us about himself and the relationship of love that he has with each of us. Retreats are a time when we remember our own stories and listen for where God may have been there for us. When we have a silent directed retreat, we meet each day with someone who listens with us to what we may have heard during our times of prayer.

Having someone to listen to what God is doing in our lives is important for all of us. It is one reason why we gather to celebrate the Eucharist. We see this happening in our gospel today. The two disciples who met Jesus on the road to Emmaus had hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples what had happened to them on the road. When they got there, they found that Peter was also telling his story about how Jesus had appeared to him. And it was while the disciples were telling their stories that Jesus came into their midst again.

I think that says something to us about what needs to happen whenever we gather for Eucharist. We need to feel that we are going to be listened to when we gather. We need to feel that we and our stories are important. We need to feel welcome when we gather. If nobody cares if I am here or not, then it is going to be harder for me to come again next time isn't it? If there is nobody here that I can talk to about what has happened to me on the road this week, then I may well go away disappointed.

Many of us may be thinking, well that is not why I come to Mass. I come to Mass to pray to God. And so do I. But I think that if we come to Mass to pray to God and really talk to God about what matters, about what has been happening in our lives this week, then God will want to talk to us too. God does that in the living Word that is proclaimed to us. We try to listen attentively to that Word. But God also needs to speak to us through one another. God may need the person who is praying beside us to speak a word of encouragement or a word of hope or a word of wisdom or a word of forgiveness to us in God's name.

Everybody who comes to celebrate Eucharist with us has a story that is important and needs to feel that there are at least some people here who will listen to it. In our gospel today Jesus told the story of how his suffering, death and resurrection had been foretold by the prophets. His story was already part of the story of the people of Israel because it was part of their longing for the Messiah who would come. When people of faith saw what had happened to Jesus then they could

believe that God was faithful to his promises to them. They could see that the Word of God in which they had put their trust had been fulfilled.

How Jesus speaks here in our gospel today is very much like what he said to those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. But here he goes further. He brings the disciples themselves into the picture and tells them that what was foretold in the Scriptures was that repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed to all people beginning from Jerusalem. Their eyes were being opened to what God was calling them to do. Jesus had begun to call people from their sinfulness so that they could experience God's love and forgiveness. But that work had to go on through the Church. Only through the Church could God embrace all people and share the salvation that Jesus had won for them. You and I share in that mission of drawing all people towards the heart of the God who loves them. We become witnesses for Christ. We proclaim by the way that we live, that Jesus is alive in us, and it is his Spirit of love that reaches out to them through us.

This weekend Fr. James Valladares has come back to Mount Barker to celebrate Mass in the year of his golden anniversary of his ordination. Fr. James was parish priest of the Mount Barker Parish for seven years, some years before Mount Barker and Strathalbyn became one parish. During those seven years his ministry would have touched many people. During those years he would have listened to a countless number of people who would have shared with him something of the story of the way that God was at work in their lives.

But it is not just priests who are called to listen to those God stories. All of us have been given ears to hear and hearts to understand. The stories that we bring to our Eucharist each week, stories of what happened to us along the road, are often stories about our struggles and our lack of understanding of what is happening to us. They are often stories about how we have messed things up. But when we share them with the Lord, or share them with one another, we realize that those stories are not just about ourselves. We begin to recognize that they are also stories about Jesus. They are stories about Jesus because he has been there with us in our struggles and doubts and confusion. And he has been there picking us up when we have failed. And we come to realize that despite our weaknesses the risen Jesus has been there in us, and through us has been reaching out in love to others. The Easter story is still being told.