

Third Sunday of Easter

Next Saturday we will collectively remember the story of the landing of the Australian and New Zealand troops at Anzac Cove one hundred years ago. The courage they showed in the desperate and unsuccessful effort to take control of the peninsular has become legendary. For all those who have served in the Australian Armed Forces since then, Anzac Day has become a day when they can tell their stories of what happened to them and those with whom they fought. It is a day when we are all ready to listen.

Listening to each other's stories in whatever context is pretty important isn't it. Having someone listen to our stories when we gather here as disciples of Jesus, is pretty important for us too. That is how our gospel begins this week. 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.

I can hear some of you saying already, but 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.

I think that is a real challenge to people who belong to a large community of believers. It is a particular challenge to growing communities like ourselves who have to keep watching out for people who have newly joined us. We have to put ourselves out to get to know them. 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 his story again and told 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. Not just to tell people that Jesus died and was raised to life again. But to 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.

Our Archdiocese has begun the process of trying to find better ways of carrying out the mission that Jesus has given us. I have been asked to be a member of the New Directions Task Force to reflect upon our mission with a whole range of very committed other disciples of Jesus. With your prayerful support we will try to listen to the ways that the Spirit is moving us to be Church at this time in this place. We will need to listen to the stories of as many people as we can.

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, we 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.