

The Third Sunday of Easter, Year A, 2008
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The Easter season is a time of joy and celebration for those who believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. Because of our joy and celebration of Easter, and because we know full well that Easter does follow Good Friday, sometimes we fail to realize the fear, the depression and the sense of abandonment that our Lord's disciples experienced in the immediate aftermath of Good Friday. We can understand this if we consider how much they had invested themselves as disciples. They had committed themselves to a life focused solely on Jesus. They traveled with him across the countryside, were on hand for the healing miracles, they learned about God as he taught them and others. In their lives of discipleship, they became extensions of Jesus himself, going out on missions to do the work that Jesus gave them to do.

For the disciples, the world as they knew it ended on Good Friday. Easter reversed the downward course and launched them upon the greatest adventure of their lives, but Easter was not immediately apparent. We tend to think of the Resurrection as instantly convincing, but as you heard last Sunday, with the story of Saint Thomas, not all the disciples experienced the Risen Lord at the same time and in the same way. Our Gospel story today is once, again, about experiencing Jesus. The context is a road walk to the village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. The encounter began around mid afternoon on Easter Day.

The story is odd, in that it suggests that these two disciples, walking along with a stranger, did not recognize the stranger who had joined them as Jesus. There are things in all the Gospels that suggest that Jesus appeared differently after the Resurrection to those who experienced him. In some ways, it almost seems that he was a ghost, walking through closed doors, suddenly appearing and as suddenly disappearing. There are some things that we are just never going to know, and an explanation of the post-resurrection appearances ranks high among them. From Luke's description of this particular post-resurrection experience, Cleopas and the other unnamed disciple were blocked from recognizing Jesus. Luke doesn't tell us why, or how. It could be that Jesus wanted the opportunity to reveal himself in this way, or it could be that their own "personal baggage" kept them from recognizing Jesus as he walk the road to Emmaus with them.

What is important is that they did recognize the Savior that evening, as he dined with them. For Bible scholars and church theologians, the manner of this recognition is very important. Luke uses the language of the Holy Eucharist to tell us that Jesus made himself known in the "breaking of the bread." There is a formula in Luke's account that early Christians would have immediately recognized and which we should recognize, too. We see, in Luke's account, words from the Eucharistic Prayer used for the consecration of the Eucharistic Bread: "he took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to them." Christians throughout the ages have found in this confirmation that Christ is present in the Eucharist, affirming a Real Presence in the bread and wine, the "Body and Blood of Christ."

There is another point that we must take from this Gospel. Christ Jesus is proactive in making himself known. The disciples did not “discover” the Risen Lord; the Risen Lord made himself known! He was proactive; he reached out. Jesus, himself, acted to bridge doubt and restore hope. Faith is a gift of grace. God reveals himself and gives us faith as an act of his love. What we do with it, how we build and enhance it, is up to us.

The story, today, ends with Cleopas and the unnamed disciple back in Jerusalem, gathered with the others, sharing with them the wondrous experience of their afternoon. In the community of believers, their faith strengthened even more. The Church has a word to describe this, *Koinonia*, from the Greek word meaning communion by intimate participation. This is the sense of fellowship we share with other believers and the sense of the intimate presence of Christ experienced in the community of believers, the Church at its best.

Like the disciples, these experiences of Jesus, risen and living in this world, today strengthen and encourage us, lift us in faith sufficient to overcome doubt and despair, and equip us daily to do the work Christ Jesus has given us all – knowing him and making him known. *Amen.*

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