

Homily

3rd Sunday of Easter

30/04/17

I was reading an article during the week entitled, 'The sunset road that turned to dawn.' Isn't that a lovely phrase, and it's so apt in describing this week's gospel, because the disciples were on the way to Emmaus, and we are told 'the day was nearly over.' The writer of the article tries to explain why the disciples couldn't recognise Jesus at first saying perhaps they were blinded by the sunset, and couldn't fully make out who this person was. That's perhaps conjecture, but I love this gospel, because as you hear it proclaimed, it rings so true. The gospel writers recorded this event long after it had happened, but they had received this account from the long tradition of witnesses who were there.

And then of course, the Breaking of Bread, which came to symbolise the Eucharist. As good Jews, they would break bread together at the evening meal, and they'd say prayers. I think some of the disciples had been present at the Feeding of the 5,000 - and they would have recognised the hands of Jesus, and the similar way He broke the bread then, and now again, at their shared evening meal. We can see that another miracle was taking place, as their eyes were opened, and 'they recognised him in the Breaking of Bread.' And they used those wonderful words, 'did not our hearts burn within us as He walked among us, and talked of all that had happened, and how we recognised him in the Breaking of Bread.'

We too need, as it were, to have our antennae 'tuned in' to those moments when Christ walks with us unnoticed. We don't notice God in suffering - in fact quite the opposite -

we sometimes feel His absence. The disciples were 'walking away' from all the suffering they had recently seen. They felt their hopes for change, for new life, for liberation had all been dashed. And that's so true of us isn't it? When we face suffering of any kind - especially if it's personal, then our hopes seem dashed, and all is lost. This story of the downcast 'journey on the road,' brings home to me, the real meaning of the word 'repent.' In English that word contains the meaning of 'change,' but the Greek word for repent - 'metanonia' contains another and more beautiful meaning - that of 'turn around and walk in the opposite direction to the one on which you have been travelling.' A CHANGE OF COURSE. And when Jesus 'revealed the Scriptures to them,' and taught the disciples all about Himself from Moses to the present - their hearts burned within them - their eyes were opened - and they turned back to the source of the suffering, and it had been turned to joy!

There are other moments for us aren't there, when our hearts can 'burn within us' through the transforming power of Christ - I had one of those moments yesterday at the children's First Confessions. I got up that morning, and I hadn't slept very well. I thought to myself, 'O Lord, First Confessions this morning- I'll be even more worn out when it's all finished!' But as I listened to the children's confessions, and those of their parents- I was overwhelmed by the privilege of being there, of being God's agent of reconciliation - and I can honestly say it was one of the most moving spiritual experiences I've had! Earlier, I had said to the children and their parents, that if they wanted a face to face confession in the confessional, they could ask me to lift the veil. Some did, but what this phrase 'lift the veil' brought home to me very powerfully, was that yesterday, quite unexpectedly, I experienced an Emmaus

transformation – the veil was lifted from my eyes, and I recognised Jesus in these sacramental meetings. I was very humbled – the profundity, and the wonderful privilege of listening to people’s life stories moved me very deeply – and it re-invigorated within me the sense of priestly ministry, and the wonderful power of the great sacraments like confession.

Now that was my little ‘Emmaus’ moment as a priest – but are you in your everyday lives tuned into these unexpected encounters with Jesus? I love the way Jesus says to the disciples- ‘you foolish men.’ I don’t think He would have said it roughly, but gently, in the sense of - you have been with Me all this time, and have still not understood. In our lives, for example, someone may check us, or gently reprove us, to correct something we’re doing wrong- to stop us walking towards the sunset. Think about what was said – don’t react negatively. Take that gentle reproof as evidence sometimes of Jesus walking among us, and using others to do his work. Jesus always wants us to walk away from the sunset, and ‘turn around’ to seek the dawn, and the ‘new light.’

The Christian message is not one of disappearing into the sunset, but of awaking to the new dawn! So today, if we take anything from this Emmaus encounter with Christ we could remind ourselves of the Emmaus moments in our own lives, and that Christ IS with us, even, and perhaps especially, when we don’t recognise or expect Him.