

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

They recognised Jesus in the Breaking of Bread

Dear Parishioners,

As the 'lock down' continues and restrictions look set to remain in many places, Catholics throughout the world rightly experience a real absence in their lives in being unable to regularly receive the sacraments (except in an emergency). But, of course, faith teaches us that God is never absent and is with us always. The wellspring of God's grace flows in many and varied channels. A crisis often brings out the best in people, even the heroic, as we are reminded each day. In adversity, some of the lessons God has taught us throughout the ages are often more readily learned. This is not just a case of being optimistic in difficult circumstances. Rather, the Resurrection of Jesus has transformed the very foundations of existence such that, even in the heart of darkness, the new life of Easter cannot be repressed but shines forever as the glorious outcome that awaits us. The Cross leads to the Resurrection and the Resurrection demonstrates that suffering and even death itself cannot *restrict* the power of God and the fulfilment of His purposes. Our faith, then, is not a mood of optimism, but the knowledge of what we might call a *divine positivity* that redeems the fallen and negative aspects of existence. We should read and re-read the Resurrection Gospels, as we do in the Easter Season, for here we are brought into the personal experience of those who first encountered the impact of meeting the risen Jesus and, as ordinary men and women, became a *new person in Christ*.

The Gospel Reading for the Third Sunday of Easter is the well-known and much-loved passage that recalls what happened to two followers of Jesus on the road to the village of Emmaus. These two disciples did not rank amongst the group of the Apostles but amongst the wider group of men and women who were also known as 'his disciples'. Their faces are downcast; their hearts broken; their hopes and beliefs shattered; their world had fallen apart and apparently come to an end. Tragically, for some, this means there is no purpose to life anymore. It is in this state of turmoil that they meet one whom they perceive to be a stranger and, seemingly, not abreast of the latest news.

This mysterious stranger explains the meaning of sacred scripture to them such that they will later say, “Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scripture to us?” Thus engaged, and at a late hour in the day, they invite a fellow traveller on the road to stay with them in their home. When he takes bread, blesses it and gives it to them, they recognise it is none other than Jesus, now truly risen from the dead. This was the second time Jesus, in simple form, celebrated the Eucharist.

For the early Christians, the expression ‘The Breaking of Bread’ was the term used to refer to the mass and here we observe its principal elements. The reading and proclamation of God’s word in sacred scripture and the enactment of what Jesus did at the Last Supper form the basic shape of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. In a missal, or on the mass sheet, we note the headings *Liturgy of The Word* and *Liturgy of The Eucharist*. In faith, we recognise the sacramental presence of the risen Jesus under the appearance of bread and wine and his Word spoken to us in scripture, not just to be received and heard, but to be lived. The mass corresponds with one of the names prophesied of Jesus, *Emmanuel*, a word meaning ‘God-is-with-us’. How, close God is to us! He is our Eucharistic Lord who wants to walk the road of life with us. When faith is lacking or insufficient, the risen Jesus is made a ‘stranger’.

It is instructive to recall, especially at a time when we are prevented from attending Church, that two disciples encountered the risen Lord ‘on the road’ and ‘at home’. The Church does not consist of bricks and mortar, but ‘living stones’ and ‘active members’ who form the body of Christ wherever they are. In this sense, we are all disciples on the road of life, not to a village, but to the destination of glorious Resurrection.

Fr Anthony