

3rd Sunday of Easter - A
Acts 2:14, 22b-28;
I Peter 1:17-21;
Luke 24:13-35
Little Flower - 4/26/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

In the reading from Acts last Sunday, we were told that the early Christian community “*devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers*” [2:42]. The phrase *breaking of the bread* was the early Church’s name for the Eucharist. As you know, the two principal parts of the Mass are the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. If we read today’s Gospel carefully, Jesus’ journey to Emmaus with the two disciples included both a Liturgy of the Word and a Liturgy of the Eucharist.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus met up with the two disciples on the road and started a conversation by asking what they were discussing. Not recognizing Jesus, they were amazed that he did not seem to know what had happened in Jerusalem the last few days, so they told Jesus the story of his passion, death, and resurrection. Jesus then proceeded to interpret “*to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures.*” Their conversation parallels our Liturgy of the Word.

There are several takeaways from this part of the story. The disciples were trying to make sense of their experience of Jesus’ crucifixion and death. Jesus used the Old Testament prophecies to help them interpret their experience. First, this took place on a journey. The truth is that our life is a journey and our faith is a journey. We spend our whole lives trying to make sense of our lives and our faith. For most of us, this has been even more true during the coronavirus.

Second, Jesus applied the Old Testament prophecies to himself to interpret their experience. One truth we must never forget is that Jesus not only reveals himself to us, but paradoxically he also reveals us to ourselves. When the Scriptures are proclaimed at Mass or when we read the Bible, what we are hearing or reading not only tells us something about God but also tells us something about ourselves, helping us make sense of our lives and our faith.

When the two disciples arrived at their destination, Jesus acted as though he were going farther, but they urged him to stay with them. During dinner, “*he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them.*” They immediately recognized him, and he vanished from their sight. At the same time, they came to the realization that their hearts were burning inside them as he spoke to them on the way and opened the Scriptures for them. They quickly returned to Jerusalem to share the good news of his resurrection with the apostles and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread, in other words, in the Eucharist.

Although their hearts were burning within them as Jesus interpreted the Scriptures to them, they only recognized him in the breaking of bread. As Catholic Christians, today, just as in the time of the apostles, the Eucharist, especially Holy Communion, is the heart of our experience of Jesus. However, the Eucharist enables us to recognize the Lord Jesus not only in Communion but also in Scripture, others, ourselves, and our world. “*Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf*” [I Cor. 10:17].

Second, today’s Gospel reminds us that the Eucharist is about relationships. The Liturgy of the Word forms us into a community of shared vision and values. The Liturgy of the Eucharist forms us into a community of intimacy, not a community of emotional intimacy but the intimacy of true love grounded in Christ’s love for God and us. Mass online is not the same as attending Mass with your parish family. Spiritual Communion is not the same as sacramental Communion.

My brothers and sisters, in normal times, today we would be celebrating First Communion. This week please pray for our First Communicants. When we are able, we will celebrate their First Communion in our traditional way.