

3rd Sunday of Easter - A
Acts 2:14, 22b-28;
I Peter 1:17-21;
Luke 24:13-35
Little Flower - 4/23/23

My Brothers and Sisters,

Last Sunday's readings focused on the institution of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and a description of the early Christian community. The reading from Acts stressed the importance of community faith and community prayer, the importance of the breaking of the bread, which is another name for Eucharist, and the importance of serving one another and sharing with one another within the community. It is interesting that last Sunday Pope Francis asked:

... where do we seek the Risen One? In some special event, in some spectacular or amazing religious manifestation, solely at the emotional or sensational level? Or rather in the community, in the Church, accepting the challenge of staying there, even though it is not perfect? Despite all of its limitations and failures, which are our limitations and failings, our Mother Church is the Body of Christ. And it is there, in the Body of Christ, that, now and forever, the greatest signs of His love can be found impressed.

One of the greatest signs of Jesus' love is the Eucharist. Today's Gospel tells the story of two disciples and their journey to Emmaus on Easter Sunday. Some Scripture scholars would argue that this journey was a celebration of the Eucharist.

As you know, our Liturgy has two principal parts, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. During the first part of the journey, Jesus celebrated a Liturgy of the Word with them. After they told Jesus about all the events of the preceding days, *"beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures."* When they arrived at Emmaus, while they were at dinner, *"he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him."* Although they did not recognize him as they walked, in hindsight *"they said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?'"* When they returned to Jerusalem, they told the apostles all that had taken place on the way and how they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. The phrase *breaking of the bread* was an early name for the Eucharist. The meal, therefore, was a Liturgy of the Eucharist.

At the time of the Reformation, many of the Reformers believed that the Catholic Church did not give enough emphasis to the Word of God, which was true. On the other hand, they also believed that many of the rituals of the church were superstitious. Therefore, many of their churches became only or primarily churches of the Word. The Catholic Church has always been and will always be a sacramental Church. Although the disciples' hearts were burning within them while Jesus opened the Scriptures for them, they only recognized him in the breaking of the bread, i.e., the Eucharist.

Although the Church rightly puts great emphasis on the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, a recent article reminds us of the words of the Second Vatican Council:

Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, ...but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Mt 18:20)" (Sacrosanctum Concilium §7).

My brothers and sisters, the two disciples in today's Gospel were on a journey of faith. If last Sunday's Gospel focused on the sacrament of Reconciliation, today's Gospel focuses on the importance of the Eucharist in our journey of faith. We meet the Risen Christ primarily in the Eucharist.