

## Third Sunday of Easter (B)

April 22, 2012

If you drive around town, you spot lots of churches with many signs. There are churches whose signs indicate that they are a church for all people, a church with wonderful choirs, friendly atmosphere, outreach to the poor, churches that boast of powerful preaching, singles' ministries and ministries to gays and lesbians, ample parking, family-life centers, twelve-step programs, supportive child care, active youth ministries. There are, of course, many Catholic churches that advertise their Mass schedules.

When you contrast all these churches with the church of today's Gospel, something startling sticks out. The eleven and those gathered around them, like the two disciples from Emmaus, are a church with no plan, no promise, no program, no perky youth ministry, no social justice committee, no parking lot, not even a church of powerful preaching.

Oh, yes, there were those like the two from Emmaus who were bold enough to tell those gathered about how their hearts burned when the risen Lord walked with them and how they recognized him in the breaking of the bread. And there were some brave enough to greet the two disciples with the astonishing news: "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!"

But it was also a chaotic church. John tells us they were locked up in the upper room. Luke today tells us they were frightened, in panic, their minds disturbed, incredulous. This terrified little band huddled in the corner of a room with a chair braced against the door had only one thing going for it: the risen Christ. In the final analysis, this is a story about how the risen Christ pushed open the bolted door of a church with nothing. How the risen Christ enters the fearful chambers of every church and fills the place with his own life and simply asks his disciples: Got anything to eat?

This morning I want to mention this community of Christ Our Hope. I want to do this for two simple reasons: First, because I love you for who you are and who you strive to become, and secondly, because I realize that many of you are saddened and even angry at the actions of our archbishop. Now I want to be perfectly clear that I am a Catholic priest who recognizes and respects the teaching authority of our local bishop. He has been here several times and is kind and present to his people. He has not only the right but the obligation to keep good order of the church in his care. We are in a Catholic communion. A universal communion.

But I must admit that I am confused when I hear stories about the treatment of gays and lesbians and the distrust of women religious by the larger church. I am in awe of our commitment to the Gospel, our social outreach, our sense of prayer and song, the sheer energy of our Catholic lives. In my sixteen years as Vicar for Clergy I visited every church in this Archdiocese. Often I found the same sense of Catholic community and prayer that I experience here. But at other times, I was shocked by what I experienced.

There is one parish in which almost every Sunday homily is about sexual morality. It is a parish where the vast majority of the people who attend Sunday Eucharist are elderly. There is the parish where the pastor came out and told the people he didn't have time to prepare a homily because he just got back from vacation. He said something like "So, all I have to say is that if you are sinning, stop it. If you are not sinning, keep up the good work. Now let us rise for the creed." At another Mass I'd say at least one-third of the assembly left after communion. In another parish I could hear the Eucharistic minister say: "The Blood of Christ and have a nice day!" And we're after the nuns?

It's easy to succumb to cynicism, but we can't. We live in a society that has pretty much given up on our political leaders. A society where fewer young people vote each year because they don't believe it will do any good. And we are people who are perplexed by the seeming lack of confidence from our own religious superiors. But if we at Christ Our Hope were stripped of everything we would still be a church where the risen Christ is present to push us, to challenge us, to comfort us, and especially to feed us.

Maybe that's the sign we should hang outside our church doors. A sign that reads: "We are a Catholic community where all are welcome because we are a community who truly believes in the presence of the risen Christ." Or, more briefly, "Looking for Christ Our Hope – Come in Here." With all sincerity, let us pray for our church, in Rome, here in Western Washington, for Archbishop Sartain called to lead us, and for all of us at Christ Our Hope. And, above all, look to the Risen Christ who is our Hope!

Paul A. Magnano

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