

Easter Sunday Evening Mass

April 8, 2012

Have you noticed that most of the Easter stories have one thing in common? They do not start out very happily. You have the story of the women going to the tomb to anoint the dead body of Jesus, or the apostles cowering behind locked doors in fear, or Mary Magdalene weeping at the tomb; Thomas clinging to his doubts, two depressed disciples walking down a road.

In the stories of the appearances of the risen Lord, Jesus turns the downside back up. When Jesus comes onto the scene in tonight's story, the two disciples do not recognize him. "Their eyes were prevented from recognizing him," we hear. They do not recognize him. And Jesus does three things. First, he asks about them and listens to them: "What are you discussing?" They respond with the longest speech in the New Testament, other than those of Jesus. Second, he then interprets Sacred Scripture for them. After a less-than-pastoral start, he turns to the Scriptures to help them understand he *had* to die for our redemption. Finally, he takes, blesses, and breaks bread with them. And their eyes are opened.

That is the goal of the risen Lord in all the appearances: opening eyes. He wants people to see – with eyes of faith. He wants his followers to see him as risen Lord and to see life differently. And when they do, they are moved to act. They get back on the road, return to the place of death, only to find it a place of new life. "He has appeared to Simon," the apostles shout out as they run through the city.

Easter life is about coming to see beyond the darkness, about returning to hope. We are all on the road. Again and again we go from Jerusalem to Emmaus. We leave the pain of broken dreams behind us, and just keep walking. But that is not enough. No matter what the brokenness – this is not God's plan. God has destined us for life – and to bring life. We are meant to move beyond hurt to healing, as much as that is humanly possible, trusting in God to care for what we cannot do. We are not abandoned by God, by Jesus, by the Spirit of new life. New life is possible. We have to see and work for new possibilities.

Every week we have an Emmaus experience when we come here. We start by calling to mind what's happening – what is the sadness, the crushed hopes, the things we have messed up that prevent us from seeing. Then God speaks to us of Jesus through the Scriptures and the preaching (Panel One, *The Way of Emmaus*). Then Jesus becomes present in the breaking of the bread (Panel Two), and our eyes are opened to respond to the words: Behold the Lamb of God. Then we, too, (Panel Three) are sent on our way back into life, to see with the eyes of Easter faith.

Thomas Merton has written about this experience of seeing with Easter eyes. He was on a street in downtown Louisville watching people pass by: “Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God’s eyes. If only they could see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time, there would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed.”

The gift of the risen Lord is the gift of faith, of recognizing his presence. And when he comes, he brings peace and hope and joy. Perhaps you recall some of your own moments of Easter vision. Often they come barely noticed: a sudden appreciation for another person, an impulse to do “the right thing” for another, being filled with a sense of inner peace and joy at the beginning or end of a day. We are an Easter people continuing on our journey. And Alleluia is our Easter song.

Paul A. Magnano

Pastor