

3rd Sunday Easter Year "A"

April 29-30, 2017 Cathedral

Readings: Acts 2:14, 22-33; 1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35

The account of the appearance of Jesus on the Road to Emmaus is one of the most intriguing in all of the Scriptures. Oh how I would have loved to be on that road with Him traveling to the village in his presence! Over the years, I have been asked many questions of a theological nature- one is as difficult as any- How could they not have recognized the Lord? He was right there in their presence.

The Gospel account indicates that the distance involved was sixty stadia. A Roman *stadium* was just over two football fields long. Thus, sixty stadia equaled just about seven miles. That is a long time to walk with others. As one who recently completed a two-week trek, our group spent hours walking and conversing about myriad topics. The journey to Emmaus would have taken several hours. Can you imagine if you were afforded several hours with Our Risen Lord? Why didn't they recognize him?

Augustine, the great 5th century church father, reflected on the dimness of the apostles' perception: "They were so disturbed when they saw him hanging on the cross that they forgot his teaching, did not look for his resurrection, and failed to keep his promises in mind."¹

But in another writing, he elaborates: "Their eyes were obstructed, that they should not recognize him until the breaking of the bread. And thus, in accordance with the state of their minds, which was still ignorant of the truth 'that the Christ would die and rise again', their eyes were similarly hindered. It was not that the truth himself was misleading them, but rather that they were themselves unable to perceive the truth."²

¹ Augustine, Sermon 235.1

² Augustine, *The Harmony of the Gospels*, 3.25.72

Maybe we will never know for certain; I do not think it was because they were stupid. Rather, their hopes were dashed, and when our hopes became dashed, we can tend to give up, to stop trying. Perhaps in their distress they simply lost the will to believe and hope. In this respect the Eucharist was the turning point. Nourished by the Eucharist, their hope was restored, their spiritual sight was recovered.

Rather than focus on the ‘why’ of the event, it might be more fruitful to examine the ‘how’ of the account. The account gives key indications for how to evangelize the young, emphasizing that it is Jesus who evangelizes through his word and that evangelization takes place by walking alongside people, answering their questions, listening to their joys and sorrows, and then giving them a word of hope and a community in which to live it. That is called accompaniment, and Pope Francis has most certainly brought it from and center in his preaching and writing.

It is about meeting people in their familiar spaces, speaking a language they understood all the while doing so zealously. We must find ways to make the Gospel speak to our own age without compromising its character or becoming a gimmicky Church. Beauty speaks to people; the sacred liturgy beckons.

But so too does engaging people in familiar places, comfortable venues. The Cathedral Young Adults are gearing up for their summer Theology on Tap series. Many of their events are held in a Church, but this event brings the Gospel into a public place, and that is good for all people. Marriage preparation provides a great opportunity for evangelization at a critical time, but it can be a little intimidating for the couple. Gathering in a coffee shop for the initial meeting is more inviting. And because I love coffee, it is a win-win for all involved!

Next week's Rosary Procession may conclude in the Cathedral, but it begins in a very public place, the steps of the Capitol! This public witness is important; the Lord gave us a beautiful day; let us show forth our faith, let us witness to it on the highways and by ways. Faith is intensely personal, but it is not therefore intensely private.

Let us pray for the same zeal and excitement in our lives shown by the disciples after they had recognized the Lord; zeal for His Word, zeal for his presence in our midst and the desire to share what we have found with others. "Lord Jesus Christ, open our eyes of to recognize your presence within us and our minds to understand the truth of your saving word."