

Christ is risen! Alleluia! In the name of ✠ Jesus.

It's still the day of Jesus' resurrection in our Gospel. You and I may have passed the feast day, but we're still celebrating Jesus' resurrection. Actually, today's Gospel happens chronologically before last Sunday's Gospel.

Today, we walk along with two of Jesus' disciples on the road to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. Interestingly, we don't know where the Biblical Emmaus is. We know where Jesus was buried; a church was built over that site, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. We know where Bethlehem is—we have a Christian brother and sister from Bethlehem with us today. And a church has been erected where, some think, is the place of Christ's birth: the Church of the Nativity. But not Emmaus; several places are suggested as the Emmaus of old.

So, these two were plodding along this Emmaus road. By the way, these two disciples were not from among the Twelve, nor now the Eleven. They were part of the greater group of disciples, who followed Jesus. As we learn, one of them was named Cleopas.

And, likely their steps were slow and heavy, not because of any particular difficulty of the road, not because of any physical burden they were carrying, but because their hearts were heavy, their spirits were laden with sorrow. Three days prior, their teacher, surely an innocent man, had been betrayed by one of their own. He had been falsely accused and condemned to death; He had been brutally scourged, mocked, and hung on a cross. Two more of His disciples had hastily buried Him.

They were surely shocked, dismayed, depressed. They had put their hope in this Rabbi. They thought He was the Messiah. They *“had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel.”* But now their hopes were dashed. They talked along the way, discussed all that had happened along the way, surely lamented and maybe even shed some tears along the way.

A man came up to them; they didn't recognize Him. We're told it was Jesus, but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him. But they probably welcomed this addition to their small company. Perhaps he would change the topic, and they could forget, even for a little while.

But Jesus didn't join them to distract them from their sorrows. He pointedly asked them what they were talking about. Surely, it was obvious, they probably thought. “We're talking about all the things that had taken place in Jerusalem in the past week. You've been in Jerusalem, and you don't know about them?” “What things? Tell me,” the mysterious (and apparently uninformed) man said. And they proceeded to relate the Holy Week saga: Jesus' Palm Sunday entrance, His

teaching in the temple, the New Testament in His blood, His arrest, false accusations, condemnation, scourging, His crucifixion and burial. More than that, they told the man about the women's early morning visit to the tomb, the vision of angels and their message—Jesus was alive! A couple of Jesus' close disciples even went to the tomb and verified it: it was empty!

But who could believe such an incredible story? Jesus risen from the dead? Sure, He raised others from the dead, most recently Lazarus, but He surely couldn't raise Himself. That's impossible!

The mystery man spoke up, chiding the two a bit, but instructing them from the Scriptures, that is, from Moses and all the Prophets, about who this Jesus of Nazareth really was—by promise and by type. He was the seed promised long ago to Adam and Eve, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the one who would defeat mankind's archenemy (Gen. 3:15), the one who would be a blessing to all "*the families of the earth*" (Gen. 12:3), the king who would come forth from Israel (Num. 24:17), the prophet like Moses, speaking God's words. He was the perfect substitute sacrifice, a ram offered up instead of Isaac (Gen. 22:13); He was the antitype of Joseph, killed, buried, risen again (Gen. 37:20-28). Jesus was the son of David, the king who would establish an everlasting kingdom (2 Sam. 7:12-16), born in David's city (Micah 5:2), the one who came to live righteously and to execute justice in the land (Jer. 23:5-6), one who would do mighty signs and wonders (Isa. 61:1), but one who would give His back to those who strike and would not turn His face from those who mocked and mistreated him (Isa. 50:6), and ultimately, one who was numbered with the transgressors, condemned and hung on a cross, one on either side of Him, and who poured out His soul to death (Isa. 53:12). And their hearts burned within them. Faith was being rekindled in them; hope was burning away their despair.

Whoever this man was, He certainly had insight. But still they didn't recognize Him. "Stay with us," they urged Him. "It's late." He pretended like He would continue on, but He stayed and reclined at table with them. And He did the most extraordinary thing, reminiscent of something seen or perhaps told about. The man took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the two disciples. And, their eyes were opened. They recognized this mystery man. It was Jesus, and He disappeared from their sight.

For Jesus had another place to be. He had to appear to the disciples in the locked room and show Himself—His wounds—to them. The two returned to Jerusalem, and to the other disciples. I'm sure they wasted no time, but by the time they arrived in Jerusalem, Jesus had vanished again. The eleven were excitedly talking about how they had seen the risen Jesus, and Peter before that. Surely breathlessly, the two related their encounter with Jesus, all that He taught them, and how they recognized Him in the breaking of bread.

Brothers and sisters, we are all walking the roads God has placed us on, and perhaps we plod along our way, too. It can be difficult in the world. The world and all its forces seem arrayed against Christian truth and righteousness and mercy. The world fights against Christ and His followers. *“In the world you will have tribulation”* (John 16:33). Our brothers and sisters in the Middle East know it more than we; they experience it daily.

But, every week, we come here to church, here to be reminded: we have received the Holy Spirit and forgiveness in the waters of baptism; the promise of Christ is ours. Here we are filled with Moses, and the Prophets, and the Psalms. We are given life through the imperishable seed of the living and abiding word of God, the Good News of Jesus’ victory over the world, our sin, and the devil. He says to us: *“take heart; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). That is a balm that heals our wounds. Paul His apostle encourages us: *“thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Cor. 15:57). These words are an elixir that warms us inside and makes our hearts burn again with renewed faith. And then Jesus breaks bread with us; we recognize Him there ... body in the bread; blood in the wine; forgiveness, life, salvation in both; and we return from the altar refreshed, ready to go forth from this brief respite, back into the world, merging back onto that busy road with those who seek our demise, yet always ready to share what has happened to us in our Christ encounter.

Yes, fellow disciples, see yourselves in the two on the road to Emmaus ... not the Twelve sent out as apostles, but as disciples still, walking with Jesus along the way, coming here to be fed by both word and supper, the breaking of the bread, and readied to go forth into the world as witnesses of it all, by word and deed.

Fellow disciples, I leave you with the words of St. Paul: *“as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving”* (Col. 2:6-7). God grant it to us for the sake of Jesus.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.

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