

3rd Sunday of Easter, Year A
St. Mary's
Acts 2:14, 22-23
Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11
1 Peter 1:17-21
Luke 24:13-35
Sunday, April 6, 2008

It is the day of the Resurrection. Two of Jesus' disciples are walking on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They had faith in Jesus as the Messiah but their hopes have faded because they see the Crucifixion as a defeat. Before leaving town, they heard that the women found the tomb empty but they don't know about the Resurrection so the empty tomb only adds to their confusion and disappointment. Thus, we find them walking away from Jerusalem.

Do you ever feel the same way? Like you have had faith in Jesus but somehow you feel let down because things didn't go the way you hoped. And you just feel like walking away. This can be a normal, but not desirable, response in times of crisis.

While confused and disappointment the two disciples are talking about what happened, probably trying to make some sense of what has happened. They are trying to hold onto their faith.

It is here in this moment of difficulty that Jesus appeared to them. However, they were *prevented* from recognizing him so they talked to him like they would talk to anyone else. They are surprised when he doesn't seem to know anything about what has happened.

Jesus knows they don't understand. Before his Crucifixion, Jesus had been teaching them. But what they learned then was only the tip of the full teaching. Think of it in terms of an iceberg. What you might see floating above water on an iceberg is in

actuality only a small part. There is more underneath the surface. That is what our faith is like.

That is why that Jesus appeared to them. He knew they won't understand. So, Jesus explains to them all the prophecies and scriptures that referred to them. Yet, even though their hearts were burning with the words he spoke they did not recognize Jesus. It is only when they sat down to share a meal together that they recognized Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

It is that same breaking of the bread that we will celebrate here on the altar in a few minutes. But even before we get to the breaking of the bread, right now we are doing what Jesus did with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we are breaking open the Word, the scriptures about God.

Thus, in the story of the road to Emmaus, we see the basic structure of our Mass. We begin with the Liturgy of the Word, after a short greeting, and then we celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist. It is what Jesus called us to do when he said "Do this in memory of me."

How well do any of us, myself included, understand the fullness of the mystery of the Scriptures and the Eucharist? Again, all we see is the tip of the iceberg. So much remains a mystery.

But in that mystery do we open ourselves to the mystery or do we let our minds wander because we don't understand. Some people, maybe even all of us at some point, feel like the Mass doesn't really speak to them about what is going on for them.

In the midst of their confusion and their loss of hope of a messiah, Jesus appeared to the disciples. They were on a journey to Emmaus. They, like us, were also on a

journey of faith, where God is at the end of the road. But Jesus does not wait for us to come to him. He comes to meet us in the daily events of our lives but he does not always make his presence known.

It is a mystery.

How do we open ourselves to new understanding on this mystery?

We have taken an important step in coming here today. It means that something does burn in our hearts to draw us to Jesus. Will we understand everything the scriptures say to us in the readings today, perhaps not? But we can still be strengthened and guided by what is revealed to us.

Do we believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist? I do. But do I understand how Jesus comes to be present in the Eucharist? We know that in the Liturgy of the Eucharist the gifts of bread and wine are brought forth, symbolizing not just bread and wine but the thanks and gifts we offer God for all he does for us. There is the Eucharistic prayer with the consecration. The presider says most of the prayer with you responding with the proper parts. But it is the priest alone who celebrates the liturgy.

Vatican II spoke of the *active participation* of the people at Mass. In a visible form, this means joining in singing the hymns, the altar servers, the lectors, the Communion Ministers, and joining in with the appropriate responses.

That much is obvious but *active participation* goes beyond that. In the Liturgy of the Word, it means really *listening* to the Word read for us and the homily. It means reflecting upon what the Word means for each of us individually and together in society. It also means thinking about what goes on in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The gifts are brought up – what gifts do we offer. And we pay ANY attention to the words of the

Eucharistic Prayer. Most people are aware that the Eucharistic Prayer includes a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come upon the gifts of bread and wine but do you know that there is also a prayer that asks the Spirit to come upon the people to transform us into one body?

Today I will use Eucharistic Prayer 3. There is a line after the memorial acclamation where I will say (to God) we offer this holy and living sacrifice. This is the Eucharist made present on the altar but it is also the gifts we offer.

To help you more actively participate in the Mass, we are working to provide some teaching about the Mass. For now, I just encourage you to embrace the mystery of faith. Listen to the words of the prayer. Open your hearts to God and let them burn with the fire of faith.