

Homily For April 26, 2020:

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Today's gospel reading is the famous 'Road to Emmaus' passage. I don't remember whether it was in high school or my early twenties when it finally hit home - that the encounter of the two disciples with Our Lord follows the same pattern as the Mass. Christ breaks open the Scriptures (the Liturgy of the Word) and then Breaks the Bread (The Liturgy of the Eucharist). And Jesus is recognized in the Breaking of the Bread.

Described in the words, "...he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them." Words used to describe the multiplication of the loaves and fish and his actions at the Last Supper. Words we use still today at each Eucharist.

From there it seems so obvious that many of the other Resurrection Appearances take place in the context of a meal. And Jesus still comes to us in the Breaking of the Bread.

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There are a multitude of places to center on in today's gospel. One of those places is that, like many of the Resurrection Appearance, Jesus is not recognized right away. There have been many reflections throughout the centuries on why this was the case. I think it would be nice to explore some of those reflections today.

What are some reasons the two disciple's "eyes were prevented from recognizing Him?"

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One reason was expounded on recently by a Father Dwight Longenecker. He considered how those who knew Our Lord only knew Him weighed down by fasting, working hard, and being rejected. Christ is the Divine Second Person of the Trinity. But His glory was only hinted at occasionally in His human body until the Resurrection. He was unrecognizable because he DID look different. They were encountering the new life of the Resurrection, new life in Christ.

This is good for us to remember. We are not God. We are fallen creatures. We are still on earth. But many of us have had the experience of meeting someone who is worn down by regret and despair. And after they experience having been given Christ's love, forgiveness, and redemption - seeing them later on is to find them at first unrecognizable. The burden is lifted, they are free. They look new.

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Another possible reason the disciples were prevented from recognizing Jesus is, as one commentator shares from the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas “Divine things are revealed to men in various ways, according as they are variously disposed. For, those who have minds well disposed, perceive Divine things rightly, whereas those not so disposed perceive them with a certain confusion of doubt or error (1 Cor 2:14).’ Aquinas thus concludes that Jesus appeared actually in his own shape, but that the faith of those he appeared to varied in degree.”

In other words, they needed to be brought to a deeper faith before they could see Christ for who He was now in the fullness of His glorified body.

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Various others have fleshed that approach out - the approach of reflecting on what the disciples were lacking that they did not recognize Him immediately. For it is applicable to us... How might our eyes be prevented by seeing the Risen Lord in our midst?

For instance, Venerable Bishop Fulton Sheen once used the disciples’ journey to Emmaus as an analogy for the need for us today to spend lengthy time in prayer. A few minutes does not do the job. Like the disciples, it is easy for us to talk, talk, talk about the events of the day. And filled with events of the world, we tend to see Jesus in worldly, political terms. It takes time until our hearts can be burning as He speaks to us; and prepares us for recognizing Him in the Breaking of the Bread. It takes time to listen to Him; to have Him remind us of why He came; to have Him reveal to us that the Resurrection includes the Cross.

Speaking of the Cross – another person recently quoted from Flannery O’Connor: “What people don’t realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross.”

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And in Two Thousand Eighteen, Pope Francis gave this invitation in his Easter homily:

“To celebrate Easter is to believe once more that God constantly breaks into our personal histories, challenging our “conventions,” those fixed ways of thinking and acting that end up paralyzing us.

To celebrate Easter is to allow Jesus to triumph over the craven fear that so often assails us and tries to bury every kind of hope.”

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One more quote. This is from Father Todd Goodson of our Archdiocese: “The disciples are unable to recognize Jesus until he gives them food. Maybe we should think about that if we want people to see Christ in us.”

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My Brothers and Sisters, since our Baptism, Jesus Christ is walking with us. Like those on the road to Emmaus, if we do not recognize Him even after many years of following Him, He is still here to minister to us – in our daily walk – and especially in the Eucharist.

So each of us might find it helpful to ask a few question. Those questions might include:

1. How can I tell when someone has been touched by God’s love?
2. How can I add time to my prayer, so that I can listen for Jesus to reveal Himself to me?
3. In the past week, was there a time that Jesus was close, but I missed Him because I was too busy about other things, or perhaps too upset or too angry?
4. How have I recently fed the hunger of someone, so that they had the ability to look up and see Christ?
5. Are there people in my life who help me recognize Jesus?