

3rd Easter-B Emmaus Experience

Do you believe everything you hear, right away? The other day I got an email from my superior saying that he was travelling to Nigeria and somebody stole his bag at the airport and he was trapped somewhere in Nigeria, and needed me to send \$5000 by using the western union money transfer system. Fortunately I had spoken to my superior on the previous night, I was quite sure that he was still in India. Someone hacked his e-mail and was sending the e-mail to all the members of my order asking for money. Very often I get e-mails from some wealthy widows from different countries, especially from Nigeria and they want to donate to me several millions of dollars. Should I believe that email? Or should I be skeptical? Lots of people say lots of things - how much do you believe? How much do you doubt? For almost two thousand years, Christians have been saying that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead. Do you believe it? A lot of people don't. A lot of people are skeptical - this is just another scam - the church just wants your money, just like everyone else. Is the resurrection of Jesus real? Even the disciples of Jesus were skeptical. They did not want to get burned again. For 3 years, they had followed Jesus thinking that he was the Messiah. They believed! But whatever happened to Jesus right in front of them did not make any sense to them. Everything they saw contradicted their beliefs. And they weren't about to go through that again. That's why they were so skeptical.

During the days of the Bible - the cure was simple - to spend time with the risen Jesus. "Look at my hands and feet" Jesus said to them. He even ate food in their presence, to prove to them that they were physically alive. Wouldn't that be nice if Jesus did that today? But he doesn't. Instead, Jesus wants us to believe without proof. And he has given us something to help us do that! He has given us his Word. And He has given us the sacrament.

What did Jesus do to the confused disciples? When they arrived in Emmaus, Jesus "took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them," and their eyes were opened. They recognized him as Jesus, the risen Lord, and they remembered how their hearts had burned within them as they talked with him on the road.

He pointed them to the Word and sacrament and what happened. "He opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures." Ultimately, it's the Word and Sacrament that take doubts away. If you have doubts in your mind - go to the Bible and the Eucharist. Spending time in front of them is just as powerful as spending time in the presence of the risen Lord Jesus, just as those disciples did years ago. Here your doubts slowly fade away. Peace will come upon you taking away all the confusion and fear. Even when the rest of the world says that God doesn't care for you, the pages of Scripture tell you that God loves you, that God is for you, God is with you and God is within you.

Here in this story faith is re-explained by the breaking of the Word of God and grace is re-experienced by the sharing of the Eucharist and encountering the Risen Lord, Christian community is realized, because the disciples returned immediately to the little Christian community in Jerusalem to share their story and the Body of Christ Is Renewed. The disciples together became the body of Christ in the world, supporting one another. There is a purpose for this Emmaus experience. The purpose of Emmaus is the renewal of the Church as the body of the risen Christ in the world through the renewal of church members as faithful and committed disciples of Jesus Christ.

Like Christians and churches who are blinded by preoccupation with their own immediate difficulties, these two disciples' sadness and hopelessness

seemed to prevent them from seeing God's redemptive purpose in things that had happened.

However, the story of Jesus' resurrection does not conclude with the disciples' personal spiritual experiences. Jesus ascended to the Father, and the disciples became the body of the risen Christ through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were sent forth by the Spirit to bear witness to the good news of God in Jesus Christ. They learned to walk in the spirit of Jesus, to proclaim the gospel to a disbelieving world, and to persevere in grace through spiritual companionship with one another.

While Emmaus provides a pathway to the mountaintop of God's love, it also supports pilgrims' return to the world in the power of the Spirit to share the love they have received with a hurtful and hurting world.

How tragic it would have been for the disciples to have participated in this fateful week in Jesus' life, and to have walked away unchanged. How tragic it would have been if they simply returned to their homes, and picked up their lives where they left off before they met Jesus. Would it be possible to really comprehend these truths, celebrate them, and walk away unchanged by them? I think not.

There are two expected changes that are fully recognizable in reading the Gospel of Jesus' life. The message "Peace be with you" is present from the beginning to the end. No more should our lives be characterized by fear; fear of God, fear of death, fear of retribution, or fear of powerlessness in our lives to overcome

darkness. As we contemplate the finished work of Christ and entrust ourselves to him, we will see a diminishing of fear and an up surging of peace filling our being.

A second change should come about as we grasp Jesus' statement, "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." This commission provides purpose and direction for a life time. No more must we wander meaninglessly about, trying to discover why we exist, or what is our purpose. Jesus' resurrection and this commission he gave provide the ultimate promotion--to be ambassadors of Christ in a world that lives in the darkness from which we have been delivered. We have become carriers of forgiveness to a world experiencing the effects of condemnation.

If we walk away unchanged, only to experience life as do the non-believers around us, we are missing out, really missing out. Jesus truly offers us "eternal life," not simply a life that never ends, but a new life, a life with new attitudes, with a new spirit, with new power over sin, with new relationships in a new family. We need not walk away unchanged. We can continue to walk with the disciples emotionally and spiritually for the remainder of our life. The process for us is the same as it was for the disciples. As Pope Benedict explains we are to maintain a "constant renewal of this encounter" with Jesus, allowing him to breathe into us life with a new horizon and decisive direction; to carry his message of love into the world.