

Sunday Message

THE WORD

Year A • Psalter Week 3



The Emmaus story is one of the best-crafted in the Gospel tradition. Luke brings together many important themes: Jerusalem as the place where God's plan will be accomplished; the disciples' journey from bewilderment to faith; the fulfilment of scripture; the elements of the early preaching; the presence of Jesus today in the Eucharist.

The more important location in the story is Jerusalem: the Easter mystery is not yet completed, so the disciples are walking away from the place of salvation. They cannot make sense of the apparent disaster which has befallen them because they can only see one side of the story: they have the facts about Jesus, but cannot see how this could be part of God's plan as they do not understand the Hebrew scriptures. The risen Jesus explains the events against the background of the Law and the Prophets, not by individual texts but taking those writings as a whole. When they persuade him to stay with them, he breaks bread, which for Luke is the characteristic way of referring to the Eucharist; their eyes are opened, they recognise him but he vanishes. They return to Jerusalem where the final act of the Paschal mystery will unfold with the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; they receive the official testimony to the resurrection: the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon. ■

LEARN

In appearance stories in the Bible, it is always God or the risen Jesus who takes the initiative.

There is nothing in the original text which says that the person with Cleopas has to be another man: the two could be Cleopas and his wife or another female companion.

Cleopas and his companion relate to the disciples in Jerusalem how Jesus had made himself known to them in the breaking of bread.

SAY

Christ walks beside me on the road of life.

REFLECT

The last line in our Gospel extract today says, "Then they told their story ... how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread." This is not what the original text actually says: it reads how he had made himself known to them at the breaking of bread. In the Bible, God or the risen Jesus reveal themselves to people: individuals do not discover or come across God by accident.

Luke is answering a question common to any generation which did not experience the risen Jesus in the direct way in which his first disciples did: that is, those of us who have to believe without seeing. His answer is: in the Eucharist; this is the most important way in which the Lord makes himself present to his latter-day disciples. Our present liturgy reflects the Emmaus story as it presents the two ways in which Christ nourishes his followers, at the table of the word and of the sacrament. The celebrant is there representing Christ, not as the star of the show. The word is of equal importance to the sacrament, as it should deepen the disciples' appreciation of Jesus and his place in our lives. The presentation of the liturgy is therefore a responsibility on everyone involved: the person presiding should prepare a proper homily; readers should make sure that they communicate the word in a way that everyone can understand; those responsible for music should check that the hymns they select are relevant to the particular day. This is because the liturgy is not a performance: it is the most powerful way in which the risen Lord makes himself present to his disciples. ■

DO

Notice how the celebrant breaks the bread at the Eucharist. Make your "Amen" response to the Body of Christ a real act of faith in the presence of the risen Jesus in the Eucharist.

