

Sunday Homily

3rd SUNDAY OF EASTER

26 APRIL 2020

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK III

“Their eyes were opened and they recognised him.”

Illustration

Elie Wiesel survived the Holocaust of the Second World War. A Romanian-born Jew, he describes in his book *Night* how he was taken to a concentration camp in the spring of 1944 at the age of only fourteen. One of Wiesel's most horrifying memories of Auschwitz was when the guards first tortured and then hanged a young Jewish boy, “a sad-eyed angel”. Just before the hanging, Elie heard someone behind him whisper, “Where is God? Where is he?” Thousands of prisoners were forced to watch the hanging – it took the boy half an hour to die – and then to march past, looking the corpse full in the face. Behind him Elie heard the same voice ask, “Where is God now?” Wiesel writes, “And I heard a voice within me answer him: Where is he? Here he is – he is hanging here on this gallows.”

Gospel Teaching

Today's Gospel story starts with a journey of despondency. Where is Jesus?

Where is he? You can imagine the conversation of the two crestfallen disciples. They are walking away from Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus. We know the name of only one of them, Cleopas. The two are journeying from a painful past to a hopeless future.

But then something unexpected happens. Suddenly a stranger joins them on the road. In fact, he wasn't a stranger at all, but why didn't they recognise him? Grief over the loss of someone dear can dull and blind us to life. Of course, nobody expects to encounter a dead person alive again and walking down the road. The two disciples had heard about some women going to the tomb and not finding the body of Jesus. It does not seem to have occurred to them that if the women's report about the empty tomb was true, their report that Jesus had risen from the dead might also be true. They had evidently decided that their part in the community of Jesus' disciples was over.

The story tells us that they were jolted into a new reality: first challenged about their despair, then receiving teaching about the scriptures, and finally recognising Jesus fully alive. Back they race to Jerusalem, hastening to tell the apostles they have met the risen Jesus who made their hearts burn within them.

Application

What can we learn from this story?

Being followers of Jesus gives our lives meaning and direction. We are often moving and busy but without a strong sense of purpose and meaning. Our hearts can burn within us too when we discover that Jesus is not just a historical character. He is living and ready to engage with us as we journey through life. Yet Jesus may walk beside us unrecognised.

The story also reminds us that an encounter with Jesus can lead us to take unexpected paths. The disciples envisaged the reign of God as a political triumph, and were disappointed when the crucifixion ended this expectation. Like the disciples of Emmaus, we, too, have our own ideas of Jesus Christ, his message and his Church. To see with the eyes of faith we are called to let go of our private and limited vision.

It is important too that the two disciples recognised Jesus in the act of breaking bread. This act reveals Jesus in a special way. Early in the Church's life, the term "the breaking of bread" came to mean the celebration of the Lord's Supper – a sacred experience of worship and communion. Additionally, it would be hypocritical to break bread at the Eucharist and fail to respond to the suffering of the world's poor who do not have bread broken with them, who are starving.

We also reflect that followers of Jesus are called to be people of hope. We can take great inspiration from today's first and second readings where Peter demonstrates to the earliest Christians his great faith and hope in the risen Lord and the activity of the Holy Spirit. Amidst the disappointments in everyday life or the violence in today's world we are called to look for the signs of hope and retain a positive vision. It is particularly important to face up to suffering rather than to be like the two disciples, wanting to take a road to avoid the pain. The stranger would not let these two run from the pain of dealing with the crucifixion.

"Where is Christ? Where is he?" Through the sufferings and joys in our lives and in the world, Christ is with us.