

3rd S. of Easter, Yr A.

30-4-17.

Emmaeus.

Of all the events in the Gospel, the story of the two travellers on the road to Emmaeus, we heard in the Gospel just now, is possibly one of the easiest to visualise in our minds, for in many ways we've been there, - with our hopes and expectations, our anticipation of what could happen, and the disappointment, the let-down, when it all went sour.

Easter, the Passover, was for the Jewish people the most important event of the year, the great feast of pilgrimage, when those who could travel to Jerusalem would do so, to remember the night when God had delivered His people from their slavery in Egypt.

They felt themselves in almost the same situation again, for while they were not slaves, they were under the yoke of the Roman Empire, subject to its laws, and compelled to pay taxes for the privilege of having a Roman Governor, and his soldiers to enforce the law as they saw fit. It wasn't quite slavery, but it wasn't freedom and self-determination either, and hence their hunger for deliverance.

Emmaeus, as we heard, was a village not far from Jerusalem, less than a day's journey away, and reports of what had happened in Jerusalem the previous weekend, when Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem with great shouts of acclaim, hailing him as Son of David, had reached Emmaeus as well, and gave the two disciples all the more reason to go up for the Passover, for what greater opportunity would there be to throw off the yoke of Rome, - for history to repeat itself.

Going up a couple of days early, they could have had the opportunity to listen to Jesus himself as he argued with the Scribes and Pharisees in the Temple. They were certainly in Jerusalem for the Day of Preparation, what we call Good Friday, and watched Jesus being led prisoner to Pilate, and condemned to die on a cross.

The Sabbath, the day of the Passover, kept them in Jerusalem, probably still hopeful of a miracle that would respond to their expectations, but come Sunday morning, with no change, but the awful realization that it was over, they made ready to go home. Even the rumour that some women had gone to the tomb early, only to find two angels there, who told them that the one they sought was alive, could not convince them that something special had happened. Women were not to be believed!

It is in that state that Jesus met them and listened to their story of disappointment. Only then did he invite them to think and to look at the past again. And he led them through their history from the time of Moses to the present day, of what their Scriptures had said about their need for salvation, not so much from a foreign enemy, but from the enemy within, - from infidelity to God's laws, from falling back into idolatry, and from twisting the truth which the prophets had taught about their need of a Saviour.

He led them to look at their history with fresh eyes, and to see what had truly been told them about the Messiah, and that recognition made their hearts burn. That's why they invited him to stay with them for the night, so they could hear still more. We don't know whatever else he might have taught them before they sat down to have their meal together, but we do know that he did do an extra-ordinary thing: He took **their** bread, said the blessing, broke it, and handed it to them to eat, - and, as the Gospel told us, they recognised him in the breaking of the bread, but he had disappeared from their sight.

"They recognised him in the breaking of the bread." Was it the multiplication of the loaves and fishes that triggered their recognition, where he had taken 5 loaves and 2 fishes from a young boy to feed 5000? Had they been present on other occasions when Jesus shared a meal? Or did they recognise that they had something to share themselves, and with that bread still in their hands, they set off to return to Jerusalem to share with the apostles what had happened to them on the road.

Perhaps it is significant that much of what St. Peter had to say on Pentecost Sunday, as we heard in the first reading, could have come from the news shared by the disciples who'd met Jesus on the road to Emmaus.

For us it is important to recognise that Jesus took **their** bread, which he blessed, broke and gave to them. He shared with them what they already possessed, just as we are called to share what we already possess: our gift of faith; our experience of Jesus; our hope of salvation and eternal life; the mercy that's been shown us in spite of our failures; the nourishment and strength we receive in the Eucharist.

It is we, ourselves, who have been called to be the disciples on the road to Emmaeus, - sharing what we have heard and seen of Jesus, and in that way help building the world for which He died and rose again.