

Bishop's Reflection – 3rd Sunday of Easter

The whole world was talking about it. They just didn't know what to make of it. There were so many different reports and so many contradictory accounts. It was hard to say what was hearsay and what was fact. The only one thing the two disciples knew for sure, "He who they hoped was the one to redeem Israel had been handed over to be condemned and crucified."

Jesus joins them in their walk to Emmaus, while they were talking and discussing about everything that had taken place. He wants to hear their story. He wants to enter their pain and grief. "He says to them, "what are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" And, when confronted by the question, "are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?", asks, "What things?", thereby giving them permission to speak.

So often we need to give people permission to speak, to give them an opportunity to voice their fears, worries and concerns. So often we shut them down by telling them how they should feel or what they should do. Jesus opens up the communication channel by allowing them to open themselves up to him.

Only later is it Jesus' turn to speak. Only later does he open up the scriptures to them. There is a time and place for everything, but not before the groundwork is in place. "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the Prophets have declared!" Words that may seem harsh at first, but words that have the power to open eyes to new truths and closed minds to new possibilities. "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"

"Was it not necessary?" What an interesting question to ask. I am sure they were hanging on his every word. "Then beginning with Moses and the Prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the Scriptures." Is it not necessary that the truth must first be rejected, that the prophet must always face opposition, that what may seem inconvenient at first, needs to be ridiculed and derided before it is vindicated and embraced?

It reminds me of a line in the Exsultet, sung at the Easter Vigil liturgy. "O necessary sin of Adam, that won for us so great a Redeemer." How can Adam's sin and Jesus Passion and Death be seen as necessary? Adam's sin casts us from grace and unity with God, Jesus Passion and Death comes at the cost of God's own Son. And yet, both of them reveal something that Adam and Eve would have never known had they remained faithful to God's Word from the very outset: God's mercy. It is God's mercy that becomes the central message of the Church from this day onward.

Each week the Christian community breaks open the word in order to plumb the very depth of God's mercy. "Were our hearts not burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?" These words may have particular relevance for us today. Because, as often as we come before the Lord with confusion and doubt in our hearts,

so often too does he strengthen us, console us and show us the way. How our hearts burn with unrequited love until we receive him, and how restless they are, until they find rest in him.

Pope Francis, in his teaching on the Mass, speaks of the homily as an extension of the conversation between God and his people begun in the Readings. Speaking of how the human heart must be cultivated to receive the Word and the Word must be sown so as to penetrate deep within the heart, the homilist must draw on the gift of the Holy Spirit for both inspiration and grace, so that what God has intended through Word and sacrament may bear fruit in the lives of the faithful.

Yet the Mass does not consist of God's Word alone, but comes to its fulfilment in the Word of truth becoming flesh for us. Like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, we, too, are invited to recognize the Lord in "the breaking of the bread". It is through sign and symbol that we enter into the mystery of our salvation, the saving passion death and resurrection of our Lord. It is through sign and sacrament that God respects the fact that we are not pure spirit, nourishing not only our Spirit but the body's need for sustenance and participation in what he has done for us.