

The Encounter on the Road to Emmaus

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, stay with us, for evening is at hand and the day is past;

be our companion in the way, kindle our hearts, and awaken hope, that we may know you as you are revealed in Scripture and the breaking of bread.

Grant this for the sake of your love.

Amen.

When I was at dinner at my friend's house the other night, we started talking about the ways in which Jesus has worked within us and changed us for the better.

My friend, who comes from a Baptist tradition, mentioned how she feels, knows, and has experienced how Holy Scripture has changed people's hearts for the better.

She shared how, when she has walked with those who are seeking, and are new believers, that by spending time in the word of God, she has seen their hearts, their minds, their habits, and their spirit change, because of the encounters they had with Jesus through Holy Scripture.

And for myself, I know that I've felt, known, and have experienced the Lord changing my heart when I came back to the church in my early 20s and began receiving the Eucharist regularly. For me, Jesus' presence within the consecrated bread and the wine changed my heart for the better.

Whether its through Holy Scripture or through the Sacrament of the Eucharist, both are conduits through which we encounter Jesus, and it is through these encounters with Jesus.

It is through these encounters with Jesus, that He changes us.

Throughout the Gospels, we hear the stories of those whose encounters with Jesus change them.

The Hemorrhaging woman - who, after suffering from a flow of blood for twelve years, was finally healed when she came up behind Him and touched His cloak.

The Samaritan woman at the well - who after her encounter with Jesus at the well in Samaria, becomes a disciple, spreading the Good News to the Gentiles.

Mary Magdalene - who, once she was healed from seven demons, became one of the women who were with Christ until the end of His life, and was one of the first to hear the news of His resurrection.

Today, we hear another story of an encounter with Jesus that changes people for the better.

This story is often known as “The Walk to Emmaus”.

This Gospel begins with two of Jesus’ disciples, not of the twelve, but of that larger group of His unnamed followers, travelling from Jerusalem to a small village called Emmaus, several miles away, on the same day as the resurrection.

And so, for these two disciples, as they are walking and “talking with each other about all these things that had happened”, they were processing everything that they have seen, heard, and experienced... the same things that we experienced throughout Holy Week... Jesus’ last days, from His triumphant entry into Jerusalem to the last supper with the disciples, to His death sentence given to Him by Pontius Pilate, and concluding with His tortuous death upon the cross, and the lying of His body in the new tomb that was sealed away.

They’re processing how, they feel as though their hope, for themselves, and for their people, has died when He died on the cross.

They’re trying to figure out what they do now that their friend, teacher, prophet, and leader, is gone.

As they’re on their walk, another man comes up to them and asks them “What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?”

And they stop, “looking sad”, and one of them replies to this outgoing stranger, “Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?”.

And the stranger replies “What things?”.

At this point these two disciples must be wondering if this stranger has been living under a rock for the past few months.

And they show kindness to this stranger, they don’t allow their bewilderment to show. Instead, they explain, that they believed Jesus of Nazareth to be a mighty prophet that they hoped to be powerful enough to redeem Israel, and how their chief priests and leaders handed Him over to be condemned to death and that it had been three days since that happened. Then, they explain, that when some of the women went to the tomb that morning, that it was empty and angels had told them that He was alive! But when some of the men went shortly after, they didn’t see Him.

However, what the two disciples don't realize is that this stranger who they are telling about Jesus of Nazareth is indeed Jesus Himself, resurrected!

And Jesus tries to open their eyes to this, when He replies to them after He has heard about what they have witnessed, realizing that they don't yet fully "believe all that the prophets have declared!", and He "interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures."

And even then, they still don't recognize Him.

It is only once they sat down to break bread with this stranger, when this stranger took bread, blessed, and broke it and gave it to them, that their eyes were opened, and they recognized Him, and then, we are told "He vanished from their sight."

And, after their experience with the Risen Lord, they return back to Jerusalem, find the eleven, and share with them what happened on that road to Emmaus.

This story serves as an important reminder to us, of what we are called to do once we experience Jesus, as disciples of the Risen Lord.

The two disciples, once they realize that they have had an encounter with Jesus, return back to the disciples to tell the others about their experience. They follow in the footsteps of the female disciples, sharing the Good News with any and all those who would listen.

We too are called to share with others our experiences with the Risen Lord, whether through the Word, the Sacraments, or through a direct encounter like these two on the road to Emmaus.

This story also reminds us of what Jesus does for us, even though He has ascended to the Father in Heaven.

Jesus still seeks out and craves encounters with us.

Jesus still reaches out to us, to meet us on the road, in the coffee shop, at the grocery store, and at the altar rail.

Jesus is continually seeking us out, He wants to enter deeper into relationship with Him, to grow closer with Him and let Him enter into every part of our lives, the good, the bad, and the ugly; the mundane and the extraordinary.

One way that we can do that, is by realizing when He is in our midst, by recognizing the burning of our hearts as the Holy Spirit within us on fire with love for Him, just like these two disciples did, and by feeding this Holy fire through the sacraments, through prayer, and through sharing the Gospel with friend and stranger alike.

We may not always recognize Him, but He is with us, and He is still working in us, in His church, and in the world.

And for that, we can say, thanks be to God. Amen.