



Third Sunday of Easter (Year A)

Homily

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**Sunday 26 April, 2020
Cathedral House, Perth**

Of all the stories in the Gospels of the appearances of the risen Lord Jesus to his disciples, today's story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is perhaps one of the best known and most loved of all.

In this strange year in particular, when we are all living through an experience which most of us could never have imagined, this story of Jesus appearing to his disciples and yet not at first being recognised by them is particularly encouraging for us. There is a sense, perhaps, in which the two disciples in this morning's Gospel are symbols of each one of us as we journey through this strange time.

The story seems to indicate that the two disciples have set out on their journey on the Sunday two days, as they say, after the events in Jerusalem. Their conversation with the stranger who joins them on the journey reveals that they are downcast and discouraged. It might also be the case that they are deeply afraid. The other disciples of Jesus have remained in Jerusalem, albeit locked in a room for fear of the Jews, but these two men are escaping. They are heading for another village a good distance away from Jerusalem where perhaps they believe they will be safe from the authorities who destroyed Jesus and are now seeking to destroy his followers. It is into this situation of fear, of confusion, of disappointment, and of hopes dashed that Jesus comes to journey with the two disciples. And what is the first thing he does? He walks alongside them and listens to them.

He invites them to share their distress, their confusion and their doubt with him. It seems important for Jesus to give them the chance to speak from their hearts, to name their fears and their confusion, and only then to remind them of what their faith, their sacred writings, and their experience of Jesus during his life had really been pointing to: that everything that had happened to Jesus had been a necessary part of God's plan. In that mysterious plan what looked like an absolute disaster and a failure turned out to be instead the moment when the power of death was overcome by life, the power of hatred was overcome by love, and the power of fear and doubt was overcome by trusting faith.

As Jesus journeyed with those two disciples we are told that even though they had not recognised him their hearts still burned within them as he spoke to them on the road. In these strange times through which we are living we could well spend some time reflecting on ways in which, although we did not



recognise him at the time, Jesus was walking with us. As we look back over the last few weeks can we remember times when our hearts burned within us, when it seemed as though something had happened or someone said something which brought us a sense of unexpected joy, or hope, or love? Perhaps it was something we heard in a homily as we watched the Easter celebrations over the Internet. Perhaps it was some act of kindness or of courage which we heard about or read about in the news, or even experienced ourselves. Perhaps it was in the way family members or friends or neighbours went to great trouble to keep in touch with us in the present difficult circumstances. Perhaps it was in the capacity we discovered in ourselves to be tolerant and understanding of those closest to us and to forgive all those little ways in which people perhaps inadvertently irritated or offended us.

In all these ways and in so many more we will have experienced what lies at the heart of Easter: that love is greater than hatred, that life is more precious and more powerful than death; and that it is in mutual support and encouragement rather than in isolation or harsh criticism that we are at our best and most fully alive.

As Catholics we know that our faith is not something to be confined just to the hour we spend on Sunday at Mass or to the moments of prayer we create for ourselves in our busy lives. Our faith is based on our belief that Jesus has risen. He does walk with us in the day-to-day journey of our lives. He does reach out to us and touch us not only through the sacraments which are so precious to us and at the moment, for many of us, withheld from us, but also in the very ordinary circumstances of each day. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus recognised Jesus at the breaking of the bread. It took them a long time, and a tiring journey, to do so. Until we can once again gather together in our churches for the breaking of the bread, for the Eucharist, let us pray for the grace to be able to recognise Jesus in all the other ways in which, through the generosity and love and self-giving of others, we experience a different kind of Eucharistic presence of the Lord Jesus among us.

Let us not be slow to believe, as those two disciples at first were. Let us be ready for the burning of our hearts within us as Jesus encounters us, often in unexpected ways. And let us, especially in these difficult times, be eager to share our stories of our encounters with the Lord with those around us, just as those two disciples were so eager to hurry back to Jerusalem to share their joy with their brothers and sisters in the community of faith.