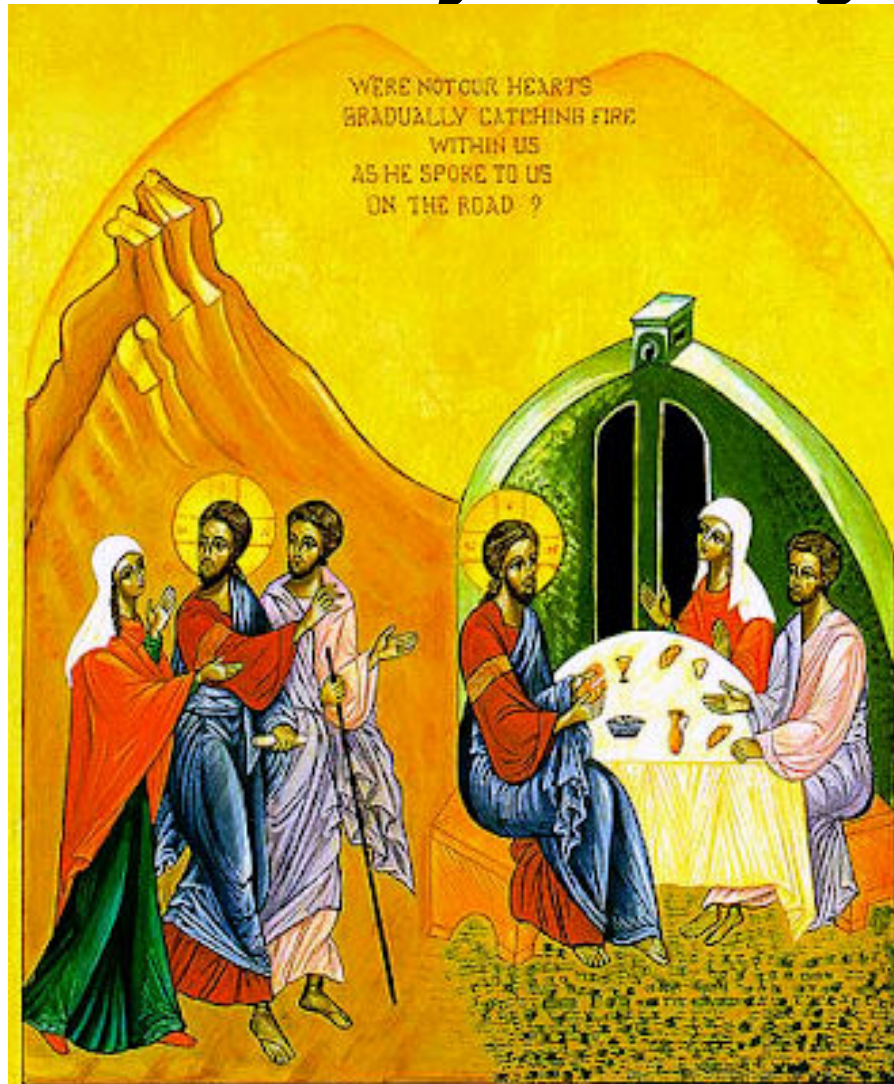


the Sunday Readings



Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us? (Luke 24 : 32)

3rd Sunday Easter Season(a)

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no disciple 'goes it' alone! ¹

introduction

Being Christian is to believe in the resurrection. That's the foundation of the Easter preaching and testimony of the Christian community. In today's gospel account, Jesus joins two disciples walking to Emmaus. They were sad and afraid about the recent events in Jerusalem. Jesus of Nazareth, the '*prophet of GOD*', had been condemned to death by the leaders of his people.

The two disciples know from women in their group that Jesus' tomb had been found empty. But they haven't the mature faith to be able to see in that absence, the presence of the Risen Jesus! Their sadness and fear are the opposite of what the resurrection of Jesus should produce in believers! However, believing in the resurrection and understanding its significance is a process that demands time. We need to know how to '*read*' the Scriptures and to '*read*' the Eucharistic action.

first reading: Acts 2 : 14, 22 – 33 ^{2,3}

[Peter addresses a curious crowd in Jerusalem]

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say(14a) . . . You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by GOD with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that GOD did through him among you, as you yourselves know(22) – this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of GOD, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law.(23) But GOD raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. (24) For David says concerning him, 'I saw the LORD always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;(25) therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope.(26) For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption.(27) You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.'(28) Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.(29) Since he was a prophet, he knew that GOD had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne.(30) Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.'(31) This Jesus, GOD raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses.(32) Being therefore exalted at the

1 Cover Image:

2 The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

3 Ac. 2:14-36 The first of six discourses in Acts (along with Ac.3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 13:16-41) dealing with the resurrection of Jesus and its messianic import. Modern scholars term these discourses in Acts the "kerygma," the Greek word for proclamation (cf 1 Co.15:11).

right hand of GOD, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear."(33)

The *Book of Acts* records Simon Peter's address to the people of Hebrew origin in Jerusalem. The Pentecost Day sermon is represented as ecstatic speech – the speaker being carried outside oneself in foreign tongues – it is a foretaste of a more systematic transmission of 'good news' to all the peoples of the world.

Part of a sermon put into the mouth of Peter as spokesman of the apostolic group. On Pentecost day Peter begins the transmission of the personal powers for life of their master, Jesus. Peter addresses the people of Hebrew origin in Jerusalem (v.14). The author has presented the Pentecost gift as ecstatic speech. Ecstatic speech refers to being carried outside of oneself. This characteristic speaking in foreign languages or tongues, is the foretaste of a more systematic transmission of the good news to all the peoples of the world.

The account in Acts suggests the activity of the apostolic group reverses the confusion of languages at the Tower of Babel.⁴ The author could have been helped by an Israelite tradition which commemorated on the day of Pentecost the revelation at Sinai which claimed that the voice of GOD, mediated by flames of fire, was addressed to all the peoples of the world, but was rejected by all except Israel. The Israelites alone accepted the Torah or Law. In this new Sinai, people of Hebrew origin, representing all the people of the world, are challenged by Peter's bold address.

Peter summarizes Jesus' ministry and focuses on his death and resurrection (vv.22-24). His address takes the form of a Jewish sermon, adopting the rabbinic style of Jesus, the teacher, commenting on three texts of scripture in turn,⁵ and applying them to the present situation. In a mood of complaint (v.23) Peter describes the trouble of the death of Jesus and then directly quotes *Ps.16:8-11*. Complaint and gratitude for rescue are placed together to speak of Jesus' situation of death and new life! This placing of complaint and confidence together, sets GOD's power for life-giving over against the power of death. Just as the Israelite complaint ended in thankful trust, as entrapment ends in liberation; so the death of Jesus ended in his new life!

response: Psalm 16 : 1 – 2, 5, 7 – 11

[a song of Trust and Security in God]

Protect me, O GOD, for in You I take refuge.(1)

I say to the LORD, "You are my LORD;

I have no good apart from You."(2) . . .

The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; You hold my lot.(5) . . .

I bless the LORD Who gives me counsel;

in the night also my heart instructs me.(7)

⁴ *Gn.11:6-7*

⁵ *Jl. 3:1-5, Ps.16:8-11 & Ps.110:1*

*I keep the LORD always before me;
because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.(8)
Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices;
my body also rests secure.(9) For You do not give me up to Sheol,
or let your faithful one see the Pit.(10)
You show me the path of life. In Your presence there is fullness of joy;
in Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.(11)*

A song expressing confidence and celebrating rescue from a plight near death. It is cited by Peter to show that the God of the Hebrews who rescued people from the power of death in the past, is the same God who is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus. Peter cites this psalm (in Ac.2:25-28) to show that the GOD of the Israelites who rescued people from the power of death in the past, is the same GOD who is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus. It is a confident song of trust, by the Just One, whose heart is set on union with the One True GOD, and not humanly created 'gods'. This union will prove stronger than death – and in Jesus, according to Peter, it did! The family of David carries the promise of GOD that has not failed. Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise and the true David. The psalm is quoted by Peter to support his argument for identifying complaint with crucifixion! And thanksgiving with resurrection!

second reading: 1 Peter 1: 17 – 21

[a call to holy living]

If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile.(17) You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold,(18) but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.(19) He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake.(20) Through him you have come to trust in GOD, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on GOD.(21)

The author encourages the Christian communities in Asia Minor, by reminding them that their alienation has been transformed by what Jesus has done. The letter encourages the small and insecure Christian communities of the Roman provinces in Asia Minor, to act on their faith. In spite of being resident aliens in terms of the dominant society, the Christian communities are in a transformed situation that has been brought about by Jesus and willed by GOD. This new situation requires and permits new conduct.

Christians are summoned to act differently because of the transformed reality in which they live. They are redeemed from futile ways (v.18) born anew through the word of GOD (v.23) and are confident in GOD (v.21). A believer need no longer rely on self, or on powers that cannot keep their promises. Jesus' resurrection is the ground for hope. Crucifixion leads to ransom, resurrection

leads to faith and hope (v.21). The life of Jesus is decisive for the community of the baptised. Everything depends on GOD's promise enacted in Jesus. When proclaimed, received and believed, that good news is sufficient for new life. Christians can live differently, powered by GOD's enduring purpose.

gospel reading: Luke 24 : 13 – 35

[the walk to Emmaus]

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem,(13) and talking with each other about all these things that had happened.(14) While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them,(15) but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.(16) And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad.(17) Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?"(18) He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people,(19) and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him.(20) But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.(21) Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning,(22) and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive.(23) Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."(24) Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!(25) Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"(26) Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.(27) As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on.(28) But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them.(29) When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.(30) Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.(31) They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?"(32) That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together.(33) They were saying, "The LORD has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!"(34) Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.(35)

Luke's account of the meeting between two disciples and the risen Jesus, on the road to Emmaus, shows the movement between worship and life in the

Christian community. Public worship and transformed lives are not separated from each other. They are integral pieces of our response to Jesus' resurrection.

As two disciples were walking towards Emmaus, a village close to Jerusalem, they debated the recent events in Jerusalem. Jesus came up and walked with them, but seeing Jesus after His resurrection, was not a straight-forward matter of seeing with the physical eyes and recognising him.⁶ In the absence of faith, the eye is blind! Cleopas and the other disciple tell the '*visitor*' about Jesus as a man and prophet who commanded the highest respect from everyone, but fell short of their expectations for him.⁷ The account continues with the two disciples telling of the womens' reports of Jesus' resurrection and the testimony of their friends.⁸ For Luke this is an opportunity to correct the traditional Hebrew hope.

The disciples were skeptical, certainly not gullible. The women had not made wild reports. The finding of an empty tomb wasn't enough to awaken faith in the resurrection. Jesus himself is the key to a proper understanding of the Scriptures (vv.25-27). The stranger criticises the disciples for concentrating on part of the Scripture - the part that promised national deliverance and prosperity as in David's time! Other parts of the Scripture spoke about the suffering experienced by GOD's chosen servants! The one who fits the messiah's credentials must suffer, . . . and "*enter into glory*"(v.26)! Although disciples shouldn't expect to be able to see the messiah they ought to believe in the messiah's victory over the opposition! Glory isn't linked with a powerful triumph. Rather it's linked with this stranger who seems to them uninformed – even ignorant. After they arrived at Emmaus the two disciples press the stranger to stay with them.⁹

Earlier,¹⁰ the author linked the feeding of the five thousand people late one afternoon, with questions of Jesus' messianic role and the prophecy about the Son of man and His death and resurrection on the third day. At Emmaus it is also evening. The people sit. Jesus takes bread, blesses it, breaks and gives it to the disciples. After the feeding,¹¹ Peter grasped something of the nature of Jesus and declared he was, '*the Christ*'. Here (vv.30-32) the eyes of the disciples are opened to who their companion is. According to Luke, we understand Jesus' resurrection by listening to the full meaning of the Scriptures and sharing in the eucharistic action. Jesus' association with publicans and sinners, climaxing in His crucifixion, continues. Like the Good Shepherd searching for the straying sheep, the risen Jesus searches out disciples trying to lose themselves in the suburbs of Jerusalem! Readers, influenced by Greek thought, would link his disappearance

6 Lk. 24:16

7 Lk. 24:19-21a

8 Lk. 24:21b-24

9 Ac. 24:28-29

10 Lk. 9:12-17

11 see Lk. ch.9

with the return of gods or angels to the heavenly realms. Jesus enters his glory, therefore the community need not be surprised that they don't see him. Disciples become aware that the centre of action is now no longer around the table – but somewhere else! This drives them back to tell Jerusalem. Jerusalem becomes the base for the disciples' future work of systematically continuing the to apprentice others in Jesus' way of newness.

Jesus had spent three years apprenticing His disciples in the performance skills of the living Torah(Law). Holy Week shattered the disciples' world and they discuss on the road to Emmaus the need for a new understanding. The stranger/rabbi turns their minds to the scriptures with new questions which lead to a new level of action. The disciples invite the stranger to a meal. At the breaking of bread there is recognition of Jesus' presence – but it is fleeting. With their new awareness they widen the scope of their action by returning to tell Jerusalem of their experience.

for sharing:¹²

- *Peter addresses a curious crowd in Jerusalem. Comment on [Acts 2 : 14, 22 – 33](#)*
- *A call to holy living. Comment on [1 Peter 1 : 17 – 21](#)*
- *The walk to Emmaus. Comment on [Luke 24 : 13 – 35](#)*

prayer:¹³

*O GOD of mystery, out of death You delivered Christ Jesus,
and he walked in hidden glory with his disciples.
Stir up our faith, that our hearts may burn within us
at the sound of his WORD and our eyes be opened to recognise him
in the breaking of the bread.
Grant this through Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead,
who lives and reigns with You now and always. Amen.*

12 Lectio Divina: reading GOD'S WORD in a moment of prayer and allowing it to enlighten and renew us: The practise of *lectio divina* requires a quiet space, a passage of scripture and the willingness to give time to the project. The passage used should be short. For the purpose of this leaflet, we suggest using the gospel reading of the up-coming Sunday. There are four steps in the traditional practise of *lectio divina*. The steps don't have to have the following order: *lectio (reading)* – read the passage of Scripture read slowly - more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why) you may want to write it down. *meditatio (reflection)* – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in GOD'S presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words. *oratio (prayer)* – allow your heart to speak to GOD, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it. *contemplatio (rest)* – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of GOD, in simple and wordless contemplation. This leaflet gives the context and some commentary on each of the readings and the psalm used in the Sunday's liturgy. Familiarity with the texts and the commentary beforehand, can better prepare our hearing and understanding the passages in our worship. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ's promise: *'Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them'*

13 The prayer that concludes the Lectio Divina is ICEL's 1998 opening prayer from the Proper of the Day. These prayers draw upon the concrete and vivid images of Scripture and conclude with a clearly focused petition inspired by the readings.

review:¹⁴

To some of us it must seem as though economic powers are the central fact of our recent history. And no relief seems in sight! Or the fundamentalist extremes of religious piety are so rigorous and firmly entrenched that the possibility of acceptance, and therefore of wholeness, is remote. But as Jesus insisted in his own time, neither Roman imperial power, nor the legalistic extremes of Israelite religious piety, were a correct reading of the situation. Jesus saw something else. He saw the present time is the time for the reigning of GOD! His alternative community therefore uses the texts of the liturgy to confront new-comers (the newly baptised) with a transformed faith and a transformed life-in-community!

The Easter texts proclaim that the life, identity and the calling of the community of readers/worshippers is founded on a quite concrete miracle that can only be attested sacramentally. For those desiring a deepening commitment, the world is not what it appears to be. Powers that seem to be in charge; ideologies that seem compelling; requirements that seem non-negotiable – all are subverted and destabilised by a profound transformation that is at the same time inclusive and enduring. The Eucharistic action, like the proclamation of the texts of the Liturgy of the WORD, is not an end in itself. The end of the sacramental reality is the generation of a transformed world!

Jesus spent three years apprenticing his disciples in the performance skills of living GOD's Torah. The first Holy Week shattered the disciples' world and they discussed, on the road to Emmaus, the need for a new understanding. The rabbi's comments turn their minds to the Scriptures with new questions which lead to a new level of action. The disciples invite "the stranger" to a meal. At the "breaking of bread" there is a recognition of Jesus' presence but it is fleeting. They widen the scope of their action by returning to "tell Jerusalem" of their experience.

Something parallel occurs in the working life of Jesus' modern disciple. Years of conditioning by society apprentices us to settled instinct and performance skills needed for survival in the commercial and industrial world. The promise of security, meaning and dignity, unfulfilled by the traditional work ethic, leave us shattered. There is a need for new understandings. Parts of the Scriptures that have been neglected, provide such a new understanding of the present time. We celebrate our communal working lives and widen the scope of our action by returning to our workplace with a new awareness of Jesus' presence and action in our world!

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¹⁴ The review – at the end of each reflection the review examines one of the themes of the readings, usually drawn from the gospel, and provides an opportunity to check our own performance, in the light of the WORD and Eucharist that we have previously heard and experienced.