

ON THE WAY TO EMMAUS
REFLECTIONS ON EUCHARIST & MINISTRY



Part One

Leader:

As we begin this time we do so in a spirit of prayer and reflection and so we begin by standing & marking ourselves with the sign of our baptism.

In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, you call us together today, in this place.

Let us know your presence among us as we share this time of exploration and prayer.

We ask this in the name of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Invitation to be seated

Gospel Reading (1)

A reading from the Gospel according to Luke:

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. 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?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth,

Reflection (1)

Today we look once more to the story of the two on the road to Emmaus. It's a story we are very familiar with. But perhaps we can linger with it for a while and tease out some of the many layers of meaning it can have for us...so let us begin with this opening passage of the story. "Now on that same day two of them were going to a village"...We enter into the story of these two... in the middle of a journey...from Jerusalem to a place about 7 miles away - Emmaus. Who were these two on the road? - We are not really told much about them. We are given the name Cleopas - the one and only time he is mentioned in the gospel accounts. But we are not told anything about his companion: was it a man or a woman, perhaps they were a married couple, perhaps they were two men - we just don't know.

What are they doing? - talking about what had been happening in Jerusalem...the news of the day...these two had gone in hope to Jerusalem and were now returning back to Emmaus with heavy hearts, filled with disappointment and sadness... They are walking away from Jerusalem, the symbol of God's presence in the scriptures and in the midst of the paschal events they are going towards Emmaus. Jerusalem is a place of failure for them and they want to leave it, get away from it but in trying to move away from it they cannot leave it behind as they are still trying to make sense of it, discussing it with each other.

For me this is part of the human condition; life is a process of moving away from something and moving towards something. It is a process that involves a letting go, a process of dying and rising. In life we are faced with many contradictions and suffering that we cannot make sense of on our own.

Today what might the news be... Recessions, Financial worries, wars, natural disasters, Church scandals, Political fall outs... It may be talk about our own situation, our own life, a death, a worry, a fear, a hope ... we talk about the events of our days and in doing so we are really trying to figure and make sense out of it all...

And then a stranger comes along the road...this stranger engages with them, he wants to become part of their conversation, he risks taking the initiative to enter into relationship with them... He asks them a question: They could reject him, turn away from him, tell him firmly to mind his own business... but they don't.

Jesus joins them on the road and travels with them. He walks no faster or no slower than them. He meets them where they are at, not where he thinks they should be or where they ought to be and journeys with them even though this journey is away from Jerusalem. They did not recognise Jesus because of the turmoil they were going through themselves, but Jesus does not judge them but asks them to recount their story. There is a great example in this .It is in our experience, in listening and sharing the experience of others that we can see God at work and in our lives. So the experience of life, of our world is primary. Our experience, our dialogue with the world and how we make sense of that draws us in to the experience of the transcendent dimension of life as God is implicit in every experience of life. We co-experience / co-know God in the multiplicity of experience we have of human experience.

Let's stop now and turn our attention away from this story and let's imagine our Sunday experience. As we make our way to church on a Sunday or Saturday evening, we are all coming from different places with some common experiences and some unique ones. We make the journey to our churches from all different starting points, carrying different life experiences and emotions...Our minds can be full of the happenings and encounters of the week...global, local, personal...but we walk in a common direction... And at some point in our journey towards Mass we begin to meet one another...getting out of the car, moving through the door of the church, as we bless ourselves with holy water, as we take our seat in the pew...we find ourselves alongside others...young and old, neighbour, friend, acquaintance and ...stranger. How is that meeting?... How do we see that stranger? Do we acknowledge them? Is it part of our consciousness even to say hello, to greet them.

In the story the two did not know it was Christ ...we are told that their eyes were kept from recognizing Jesus - something within them prevented them from recognizing the risen Lord...yet they welcomed him into their story...they welcomed this stranger in their midst...this is a key point in Luke's story...welcoming the stranger is a key to celebrating Eucharist... Just think of the lost opportunity if they had turned their backs...think of what they would have missed out on if they had told him to keep to himself? These two, whoever they are, have given us a wonderful model of ministry...in being welcoming, in including the stranger in their journey. Think of who they released into their lives...in giving we receive... How many lost opportunities do we have? How many times have we missed the chance to welcome Christ?

On a Sunday we get to welcome Christ in the congregation, in the assembly..."where two or three are gathered in my name I am there with them". Because we have gathered, Christ is present...In the midst of that assembly I get to meet the risen Lord week in and week out. But we need to remember that Christ can be in places and people we do not recognize...Christ is in the stranger... Our invitation on a Sunday when we gather to celebrate mass is to reach out and welcome that Christ in our midst.

It is in their experience, listening to where they are in their story that true ministry can take place.

Rahner held that if Christianity is only about God in my experience then it is a God experience. So through our experience we are open to the immediacy of God to every human, the mediated immediacy of God in everyday life.

David Tracey called it being present to "the God who is already there in our lives."

Augustine said that God is more intimate to a person than the person to his/her self.

Aquinas said that all knowing beings know God implicitly in every object of knowledge... God is implicit in our knowledge and experience of the world.

Carl Yung said that whether called upon or not God will be present.

TS Glist in "Little Gidding" puts it that "we shall not cease from exploration and the end of our exploration will be to arrive at where we started and know the place for the first time." Thus God was there at the point of departure and at the point of arrival.

So the question of God is not a question about the absence or presence of God, it is a question about the absence or presence of the individual to a God who is already there. The role of the Church and therefore the role of those in ministry is to enable us to experience God who is always present in our experience. Just as the disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognise Jesus and Jesus walked with them in their experience, asked them to recount their experience, listened, journeyed with them – am I present or absent to the God who is already there? or, in my ministry, can I echo and learn from the model of Jesus and allow others to see and experience the God who is already there in their experience?

Silence

with reflection sentence from Powerpoint overhead

Leader:

Imagine yourself in those gathering moments of Mass, imagine yourself walking into the church building and taking your place...now look for Christ around you...

Invitation to stand

Sung Response (1)

Verse 1 of "The Servant Song"

*We are pilgrims on a journey; we are travellers on the road;
We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.*

Invitation to be seated

Gospel Reading (2)

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, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. 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. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, 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. 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.' Then he said to them, 'Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?' Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

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Reflection (2)

Words, words, words, we hear a lot of words in our world. From all angles we seem to be bombarded with words... But we have a new phenomenon of late - the buzz word, the tweet and more particularly the sound bite...the goal of many communicators these days is to get that sound bite lodged into people's brains... Our response can be to grow tired of words and to grow sceptical of sound bites...we can be wary of the messages people are bringing to us...but oh how foolish and how slow of heart we would be if we closed ourselves to the words of scriptures... For the words of scriptures are our story - not history...these are our words of salvation. These are the words that call us to abundance of life...abundance...these are the words that tell us of compassion, mercy, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, resurrection...These are words that somehow can make sense of what is happening in our midst, in the light of Christ. But we need to have the eyes of faith in order to hear the words and recognize the message. Think again of those two travellers on the road. How were they feeling? - We are told sad; but probably also confused, shocked, perhaps angry - at the authorities, at Jesus...Remember they are getting out of Jerusalem, heading back home.

They had put their trust in this new prophet who was mighty in word and deed...but this mighty prophet, this one who was supposed to redeem Israel ended up crucified like a common criminal...This is not how it was supposed to be... And what do they go on to tell us...it's three days since his death, time has moved on and there seems to be no hope...they have missed the point...they have lived through the experience but have failed to grasp its meaning. And without this understanding they fail to recognize the risen Lord in their presence. Yet Jesus can take their experience and take the Word of God and weave them together so that it all begins to make sense. To know Jesus we must know the scriptures. Within us there is thirst for scripture and the power it has to touch, help and heal. The scripture is a living word that transforms, comforts and challenges. So each time we hear God's word in the scriptures God is there for us and with us.

Jesus delivers an amazing bible study, citing from memory passages from Moses and the Prophets, and explaining how each of them pertain to the Messiah. Jesus tied his death and resurrection to the tradition of prophetic teaching and explained plainly what generations of their scholars had misunderstood.

There are 3 movements here - **proclamation, interpretation, receiving into life**

Let's first look at **proclamation**

The word has to be spoken out loud...it then becomes real...we know that in life: We can go about for years with things unspoken; when said they become real, they become something we have to/get to face and take on board. But we need prophets - people who will speak God's message to us. In our world we still have plenty of prophets...every day we encounter God's prophets in our lives - people who knowingly or unknowingly speak a message of God to us. In our liturgy on a Sunday we also have our prophets...who are they? Our readers; ministers who speak a message from God. They are the ones who say out loud the words of salvation. They utter into being God's words of love and healing. In the midst of the assembly they take their place and proclaim aloud our stories; stories that are not about buzz words or the latest sound bites. -These stories are about the life of those who believe in and share in the promise of resurrection, -these are stories of people called to have life in abundance, not mediocrity...-the reader articulates these stories in faith and through faith so that they can be received into the very being of those who have gathered...

But how do we interpret these words: **Interpretation**

On any given Sunday, the presence of Christ in the words of Scripture meets the presence of Christ in the very stuff of people's lives... we hear particular stories, particular messages in the context of a particular season in the church year...if these are not to be mere sound bites, what difference do these words make? How do I receive these words into my life and shape my life as a result of them? The task of the presider is to help us do just that. The presider takes the proclaimed word and interprets them always in light of the resurrected Christ and in the context of the lives of the assembly who have gathered. His task is to help break open the word of God into the centre of our lives. But no matter how rich the homily, how good the interpretation, at the end of the day the final movement is up to us:

Reception:

This is because the journey from proclaimed word to interpreted word to lived word demands that the final action is ours...God gifts us with this word but ours is the initiative of response or non-response...everyday we make choices, take decisions, turn in particular directions, and act in particular ways. But remember Christ came that we might have life in abundance ...sometimes that life may not be what, where or when we expect it but part of our listening to God is a listening to see God's Word in action in our lives... Christ is present in the midst of the faithful through his word...it is our choice to welcome this presence into our lives and to allow God's word to speak to us in the rhythm of our lives...

Silence

with reflection sentence from Powerpoint overhead

Leader:

Imagine yourself in the assembly listening to the proclamation of the Word of God...what words do you need to hear in these days?

Invitation to stand

Sung Response (2)

Verse 2 of "The Servant Song"

*"I will hold the Christ light for you in the night time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you, speak the peace you long to hear."*

Invitation to be seated

Part Three

Gospel Reading (3)

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. 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. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it

to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. 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?'

Reflection (3)

Again this passage begins with an action that is at the heart of our liturgy and our ministry...an action of hospitality and welcome. The themes of hospitality and welcome are throughout the bible. In the Old Testament hospitality often brought people into a direct contact with God who was in the form of the stranger and in Luke's gospel the theme runs through that God is visiting his people in the person of Christ and it is the outcasts, sinners and those on the margins who take up the opportunity to accept Jesus and invite him in.

Jim Bowen breaks this theme down to three main dimensions:

God's welcome – God's posture, as Jesus shows it over and over again, is one of welcome to human kind (Lk 9:11, 15:2, etc.)

Us welcoming God - When the New Testament observes anyone engaged in 'welcoming', is not just a sociological statement but also a theological one. The welcome means that the welcomer has welcomed God's grace (Lk 19:5, Mtt 10:40, Jn 13:20, Gal 4:14).

Us welcoming each other – When we welcome others we are representing God who welcomed others without reserve. There is something sacramental about the act of welcome (Lk 14:12-14; Rom 15:7; Acts 28:20).

The act of hospitality in this story ushers the scene of the meal which is considered the climax of this event. Our Ministry therefore must have the hospitality of Christ at its core and this hospitality and welcome will create the environment for the kingdom of God to be realised and alive, and where the good news of the living, loving God is experienced.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus associated with sinners; he stood shoulder to shoulder in the muddy waters of the Jordan with those seeking forgiveness through the baptism of John; on many occasions he ate and drank with disreputable types; at the end of his life he was crucified between two thieves. Jesus was constantly willing to move into their world and journey with them and to engage with them on their terms. So ministry is not about standing aloof from the experience of others, passing easy judgement on them or praying for them from a distance, on the contrary it is about walking, journeying with them, to walk in their shoes and about daring to feel the texture of their experience.

We have Jesus making as if to leave (though clearly he had no intention of doing so) the Greek word used is *prospairo* "make or act as though, pretend". You don't just invite yourself to dinner or impose yourself that is the host's prerogative.

The two urge him to stay with them...not just stay but stay with them, stay in this relationship. Also we see at work the human impulse to stay with something good - prolong the good experience...the impulse to continue the nourishment - they have been fed by word and now they will be fed by bread... And in this story we see a very simple but significant reversal in role...Christ moves from being the guest to being the host...the two invite him to dine with them and he becomes the host... they prepare the table but it is Christ who leads the action of taking, blessing, breaking and sharing... It was in the sharing of this meal, in the 'breaking of the bread' that the disciples at Emmaus recognised Jesus with them. Therefore, we as a Eucharistic people, become Christ present in the world, sharing in the paschal mystery, sent forth to make present the kingdom of God – a mission of justice, compassion, mercy and love.

"In the humble signs of bread and wine, changed into his body and blood, Christ walks beside us as our strength and our food for the journey, and he enables us to become, for everyone, witnesses of hope."

On a Sunday we set the table for the Eucharist, we prepare the space but in every Eucharist Christ is the host... We will just ponder the image of meal and bread at the heart of this encounter. There is something deeply intimate about the sharing of food - food is fraught with images of companionship, community, sharing, feast, giving of self... Food and drink becomes part of who you are - you are what you eat! These travellers shared together a meal - that human interaction of hospitality, fellowship, nourishment, thanksgiving... On a Sunday Ministers of communion engage in sharing that nourishment and presence - they share in being a presence of Christ...When we say Amen to the Body of Christ we remember the triple Amen of Augustine: yes, I am the Body of Christ, yes, we are the Body of Christ, yes, this is the Body of Christ. Returning to our story, in the intimacy of a meal, in the breaking of bread, they recognise who is in their midst - they recognise Christ; and what happens? He vanishes... Jesus now disappears as the disciples now become Christ for others.in the moment they recognise him he is gone. They move from a real presence to a seeming absence in an instant... But that absence, that emptiness now has a totally new meaning and content for now that emptiness is full of Christ's presence... So the two don't panic, they don't call out for Christ to come back, they don't despair ...rather they continue to recognize... This mystical experience with the stranger, revealed in the breaking of bread as the risen Christ compelled them to run, return immediately to Jerusalem, the place that had been a few hours earlier their place of pain and isolation. They returned renewed, rejoining with the disciples to share the good news. Their hopelessness and heartache is turned into hope and courage. It is this transforming, dynamic encounter that leads us back into mission and forms the basis of ministry as each encounter with the stranger is an encounter with the risen Christ that empowers, enlivens and transforms, making present and accessible the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed and began.

They remember and recognize the burning of their hearts as Christ had unpacked God's word for them, they recognize Christ in the stranger who had walked with them, they recognize the abiding presence of Christ despite his apparent absence. For the disciples on the journey to Emmaus it was through hospitality to the stranger, listening to the word and breaking the bread that the unexpected occurred and their faith was challenged and renewed. In sharing the meal with the 'stranger' they were transformed from sadness, foolishness and slowness of heart to joy, insight and re-commitment.

Having walked with Christ, listened to his Word and shared in his meal, these two disciples believe and know that Christ is indeed present - even where there appears to be absence ...

Silence

with reflection sentence from Powerpoint overhead

Leader:

They recognized him and he vanished from their sight. Where do you see the seeming absences where Christ is present?

Invitation to stand

Sung Response (3)

Verse 3 of "The Servant Song"

*I Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too."*

Invitation to be seated

Part Four

Gospel Reading (4)

That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!' Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Reflection (4)

We come to the end of the story...and it ends with an action of response on behalf of the two. The first initiative has been with God - but the response is up to the individual ... In this story the two arise and return to Jerusalem. There is a sense of resurrection, of a new beginning about their action - they get up. They arise from their despair and they return to Jerusalem...they go back but this time with the faith to understand the events that happened there. And when they go back they carry their experience with them and proclaim it to those they meet. They go back with a sense of mission and commission from the Risen Lord.

When we look to our Sunday experience, there is a real sense of resurrection for us also. In light of the resurrection we are called to get up - like these two on the way to Emmaus. We are called to arise out of our graves.

Out of our ways that are not life giving or nourishing or sustaining...our understanding of life and its meaning is changed when we carry the message of resurrection with us. Jesus died and rose again for us, in baptism we have the promise of this new life.

In light of this new life we are continually being called and being sent...if we have heard the good news and encountered Christ the impulse is to go and do this, go and be this, go and share this ...the impulse is to move beyond these confines and reach out...in every Mass there is an exodus, a time of going out and we go as people sent, sent to love and serve the Lord in the very stuff of our lives...

Silence with reflection sentence from Powerpoint overhead

Leader:

Imagine yourself at the end of a Sunday mass...where are you being sent to and what difference does what you just celebrated make?

Invitation to stand

Sung Response (4)

Verse 4 of "The Servant Song"

*"When we sing to God in heaven there will be such harmony;
Born of all we've known together of Christ's love and agony.
Will you let me be your servant, let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace to let you be my servant too."*

Invitation to be seated

Small group discussion:

Leader:

Is there anything striking you about what we have explored today?

Feedback

Closing Prayer:

God of the night and God of the day

God of Love and life

Be with us as we go from this place.

That we might be renewed and refreshed in our ministry open to seeing you in those whom we serve.

That we may live our lives as Eucharist for one another.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Amen.