

3rd Sunday of Easter (A)
(Acts 2:14.22-28 / Luke 24:13-35)
23.04.2023

Christ, Scriptures, Breaking of Bread and Fellowship

The most dramatic moments in the story of the disciples on their way to Emmaus are, without a doubt, when Jesus is recognised and when he disappears.

This experience was possible because of what preceded: Cleopas and his friend walked with Jesus and spoke with him. Their conversation was a necessary step to unlock the door of the hearts of the two disciples, and to open the eyes of their hearts so that they may be able to recognise the Lord at the breaking of bread.

While the two disciples were blinded by cold disappointment, Jesus was able to reach down to the embers deep within them and to rekindle a fire in their hearts. The journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus hid another journey: one which led Jesus and the two disciples to revisit the past. It was a journey of remembrance which was not a nostalgic stroll down memory lane but a way to own the past so that the present might become meaningful.

This act of remembrance was a fight against forgetfulness and blindness. That was hard work but worth undertaking for the victory of truth. With Jesus as their guide, it was a journey which helped the two disciples reconnect with life. Cleopas and his friend were given a share in the Resurrection of Christ, they came back to life.

We do not know exactly what Jesus said to the two disciples. We are told that, “starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.” Jesus revisited his own story through the lenses of the scriptures so that his death might make sense for the two lost disciples. In so doing, because their lives were linked with his, Jesus also helped the two disciples to rediscover the meaning of their own lives.

I suppose the Emmaus travellers knew the prophets and the psalms which foretold the coming and the suffering of the long-awaited Messiah, but that they had not yet connected the dots, and so were unable to discern the thread which made Jesus’ death meaningful. They failed to inscribe their experience of Jesus’ death in, what Miroslav Volf calls, “a larger pattern of meaning” (p. 28). They were stuck in the mud of their feelings, of their regrets and dismay and consequently, they were unable to interpret what happened to Jesus and to themselves properly. They needed the companionship of Jesus, the light of the scriptures and the breaking of bread in order to get out of the dead-end in which they found themselves stuck.

Unfortunately, like the two disciples, often we allow our feelings, our emotions, our painful experiences to define us to the point that all these things prevent us from being truly ourselves and from living our lives to the full.

The story of the two disciples teaches us that, while it is necessary to remember, it is also absolutely necessary to remember correctly, to remember in a way which is in accord with our deepest identity, with who we truly are and who we want to be. If my remembrance of the death of the Lord makes me sad and does not bring me life, then not only am I not faithful to the Lord and the purpose of his death but I am not faithful to myself as well, I am not faithful to my calling to be fully alive.

This reasoning can be applied to all that happens to us in our lives. We have to be careful not to allow the past to define us. “In terms of identity, we are not fundamentally the

sum of our past experiences” (p. 199), but we are defined by God’s presence within us, by the way he relates to us.

And it is here that the companionship of Jesus, the light of the scriptures and the breaking of bread appear to play a crucial role in the building up of our identity and in giving meaning to our lives.

Everything that happens to us, all that is done to us and whatever we do to others or to ourselves shapes who we are but it does not define us and should not condition our future.

Everything in life should be interpreted in the context of our relationship with Christ, in the light of the scriptures and the breaking of the bread in the fellowship of the Church.

Today the challenge for our Churches is to become in truth places wherein relationships with Christ are fostered, places wherein intimate familiarity with and the study of the scriptures are encouraged and wherein there is genuine fellowship between all the members of the community.

It must be said that to remember, to revisit the past is not about self-centredness because it is Christ who is at the centre, it is he who is the lamp which sheds light into the dark recess of our hearts. Revisiting the past is neither about settling in it nor imposing it on the present. It is something dynamic which is supposed to help us face the challenges of the present with courage, with imagination and with hope.

Last year, Pope Francis encouraged us, saying: “Read the book of your life. Read yourself within, how your journey has been. (...) Reading one’s own history means recognizing the presence of “toxic” elements, (...) succeeding also in grasping the discreet ways in which God acts in our life.” (General Audience, 19.10.2022)

This is what Jesus did with the two disciples, this is what he wants to do with us today and this is what he expects us to do with one another. For the two disciples, it was a journey from a place of sadness, meaninglessness and alienation from the community to a place of joy and communion with themselves and with others.

For us, for our communities and for our countries it may be the same journey that has to be made: to move from sadness, meaninglessness and alienation to joy and renewed fellowship but it may be also a journey from the false peace of convenient lies and pretence to the deep peace of acknowledged truth about our lives.

This is not an option for our Churches, they must be – they must become more and more – communities where the past is owned and interpreted in truth, where the future is prepared with trust and courage and where the present is fully experienced as an opportunity to grow in holiness and in love.

May our vision not be clouded by regrets and fears but open to discern the Lord in the scriptures, in the breaking of bread and in the fellowship of the Church.