



April 26, 2020 - When We Cannot Celebrate It, We Live It!

Third Sunday of Easter

Scripture Readings (<http://www.usccb.org/bible/readings/042620.cfm>)

How is each one of you doing? I miss seeing you, being with you, and celebrating the Eucharist with you! How am I? I am as well as I can be during these times. Like many of you, I too am in shock at the state of the world. I am particularly saddened by the more than two hundred thousand deaths from COVID-19, of which, more than 50,000 are from own nation. I believe my role as pastor these days is to nurture faith and hope. In return, I have experienced many of you nurturing my own faith and hope. There are so many sad stories to hear and tell these days. But there are also so many faith-filled, hope-filled, and love-filled stories to hear and tell these days. These are days when sadness and hope fill our days in ways it has not done in our generation.

In many ways, this combination of sadness and hope is also the story we read in today's gospel reading. The disciples on the road to Emmaus is one of the most fascinating stories in all of scripture. Let me draw on three points from the story that might build our faith and hope.

1. Christ Meets Us Where We Are. The best part of the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is that Christ meets them where they were. Where were they? They were on the road to Emmaus moving away from Jerusalem. They were moving away from the center of the world — the very place where salvation was just revealed. This was not their proudest moment. They were confused, confounded, scattered and downcast. This is the exactly the place where Jesus met them. If there is something that we should take to heart this morning it is this, that no matter where we find ourselves at this moment, Christ is already there. He is where we are! Sometimes in ways we are already familiar and sometimes in way we may not expect; sometimes through the very person sitting next to you at home; sometimes as a stranger – Christ is already there. This I believe! Today, I one have prayer - that no matter what the situation, we may find Christ right in our midst; that no one may ever feel abandoned by God; that we might never find ourselves alone; that, just like the downcast disciples on the road to Emmaus, we will allow the Lord to join us on our life-journey. For this is true - that Christ meets us right where we are! And here is the most important truth. Often, you and I are that Christ.

2. These are Days of Accompaniment. Perhaps you knew this already or maybe not, but yesterday was the 26th anniversary of my priestly ordination. During the initial years of my

priesthood, one of my main motivations was to preach the gospel. I could not wait to be in ministry because I wanted to tell people about God. Experience has taught me that my main calling is not to preach, but rather, to accompany people on their journeys. I have learnt from the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, that ministry is not about converting people, changing people, or preaching to them. Ministry is about accompanying people while being vulnerable myself. On the road to Emmaus, the risen Christ accompanied the disciples. He inquired about them, about the events of those days, and about their life concerns. He revealed the scriptures to them, opened their eyes, entered their home, sat at table with them, and broke bread with them. These are the days of accompaniment. There are marvelous stories of accompaniment coming out these days – people grocery shopping for others, calling others, praying with them, sharing stories, cooking for the elderly, generously meeting the human needs of strangers, and of the poor. I also think of the doctors like my own niece, nurses, healthcare workers, and hospital chaplains accompanying people as they navigate these difficult times. I think of teachers accompanying their students, mental health professionals accompanying their patients, and children accompanying their elderly or ill parents. My most intense stories of accompaniment these days center around death and dying. Numerous times during this time of isolation, I have found myself with families, praying as they bid farewell to their loved ones. Last week, a dear parishioner called me to pray for his dear wife who was dying. He just wanted me to pray for her because she was not Catholic. I offered instead, to visit the family. I went. I prayed. I gave her absolution. I anointed her with Holy Oil, and I said the words of farewell. That night, Cheryl passed away. In his e-mail to me, this grieving man was so grateful that the church was accompanying him and his family during this time. Week before last, I was with another family accompanying them as they bid farewell to their father, again, who was not Catholic. We will be burying him on Tuesday. What a marvelous image this is of the Church – a people that accompanies one another. So often in the past we have only preached, judged, condemned, rejected, built walls of separation, focused on our difference and isolated others. Those days are not these days. These are the days of accompaniment. I invite us to reflect on our Christian discipleship as accompaniment - sometimes being accompanied and sometimes accompanying other disciples on the way. After all, we are all this together. We must all get there somehow. The only way to get there is to accompany one another, knowing, that the Lord Himself is with us.

3. **We Live It.** There is a paradox in today's gospel story. The disciples did not recognize Jesus until they sat at the table for supper. However, the moment they recognized Jesus, he vanished from their sight. Back in Jerusalem, they recounted how Jesus was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. I want to connect today with all of you who are hurting deeply because we cannot participate in the Eucharist as a gathered community. I

want to recognize the pain, the desire, the eagerness to be in communion with Christ and with one another. I take this sadness very seriously because it is also my sadness. But what shall we do? Perhaps we can connect with the story of the disciples breaking bread with the Stranger. At that precise moment, when Jesus disappeared from their midst, was the precise moment when Christ's presence was the most real for them. The story ends with the disciples abandoning their journey to Emmaus and returning to Jerusalem. There, they recounted to the other disciples that they had seen the Lord. What shall we do? There are many things we can do. Either we can fixate on the fact that we cannot be together to celebrate the Mass, be angry about it, regret it, and even protest it. Rather, I suggest, we look at parts of the Eucharist that we might overlook. Is it not true that, in reality, the Eucharist begins when we leave Church? The Paschal mystery is CELEBRATED at the altar but LIVED at the altar of our lives. We celebrate the Eucharist IN church, but the Eucharist is lived OUTSIDE – in our homes, in our workplaces, in our neighborhoods, and wherever we find ourselves. Let our lives be the Eucharistic celebration. Let our deeds and actions proclaim that we are a Eucharistic people, a people of the paradox. At this precise moment, when we cannot celebrate the Eucharist, is when people should encounter Christ in us in a real and concrete way! Let the assurance we give, the hope we impart, the patience we exercise, the sacrifices we make, the love we share, the burdens we carry for others, be our Eucharist. During these days, when we cannot 'celebrate' the Eucharist, let us 'live' it.

I conclude this reflection with a simple prayer – “May Christ meet you right where you are! Amen.”

- Fr. Satish Joseph

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