

HOMILY for 3rd SUNDAY of EASTER – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel tells us how the risen Christ appears to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

The Pope is visiting town & all the residents are dressed up in their best Sunday clothes. Everyone lines up on the main street of the town hoping for a personal blessing from the Pope.

One local man has put on his best suit & he's sure the Pope will stop & talk to him. He is standing next to an exceptionally down-trodden looking bum who doesn't smell very good. As the Pope comes walking by, he leans over & says something to the bum & then walks right by the local man.

He can't believe it, then it hits him. The Pope won't talk to him, he's concerned for the unfortunate people: the poor & feeble ones. Thinking fast, he gives the bum \$20 to trade clothes with him. He puts on the bum's clothing & runs down the street to line up for another chance for the Pope to stop & talk to him. Sure enough, the Pope walks right up to him this time, leans over close & says, "I thought I told you to get the heck out of here!"

Anyway, as you might have known, this is the fourth time the risen Christ has appeared to the disciples & the early Church. He first appeared to Mary Magdalene, next doubting Thomas, & then Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. After a long night hard at work, Peter caught no fish & was about to fold up his nets. He wondered what he would have to do next to earn a living or what his future in fishing would be like. When Peter felt lost in this world & was about to give up, the risen Christ appeared & told him to cast the nets on the right side of the boat in deep water. Peter listened to the advice & caught so many fish that his faith in Jesus was renewed. Right then, the risen Christ told Peter that he no longer had to catch fish. From then on, Jesus would want Peter to catch human instead.

This Sunday's Gospel tells us how the risen Christ appeared the fourth time to His disciples as following, "Two disciples of Jesus were making their way to a village named Emmaus seven miles distant from Jerusalem, discussing as they went all that had happened. In the course of their lively exchange, Jesus approached & began to walk along with them. However, they were restrained from recognizing Him... Beginning, then, with Moses & all the prophets, He interpreted for them every passage of Scripture which referred to Him. By now they were near the village to which they were going, & He acted as if He were going farther. But, they pressed Him: 'Stay with us. It is nearly evening; the day is practically over.' When He seated with them to eat, He took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, & began to distribute them. With that, their eyes were open & they recognized Him; whereupon He vanished from their sight."

Evidently like the rest of the early disciples, these two disciples were lost after the death of their master & on their way, probably home in Emmaus. They did not know if Jesus was really risen from the dead like some disciples had said or perhaps was involved in some kind of foul play. While they were confused & lost, Jesus came to guide & show them how to be His effective witnesses in the world. He appeared at the right time to re-energize their shaken faith & inspire them to carry on His mission. So, the first spiritual lesson that all the Easter stories would teach us is that we need to be open to divine revelations in our challenging & hopeless time. For the risen Christ will find the "right ways" to show us the truth. Mary Magdalene, Thomas, Peter, & the two disciples on the way to Emmaus were all open minded to have a

spiritual encounter with the risen Christ. Their openness allowed the risen Christ to meet & reveal Himself to them at all sorts of locations such as at the cemetery, at a work place on the shore, in a locked house, & on the road. Otherwise, they would never have a spiritual encounter with the risen Christ.

That leads us to the second spiritual lesson from all the Easter stories, namely, the risen Christ appeared to anyone who would willingly search for Him at any time & in any place. Some people mistakenly assume that the risen Christ would only appear to saintly people in a holy place. But, the four Easter stories that we have heard so far have told us otherwise. Most of the disciples who have blessed to meet the risen Christ did not have an impeccable spiritual record. Mary Magdalene was possessed with evil spirits & had to call on Jesus to drive them out. Peter betrayed his master by denying to know Him. Thomas did not have any faith in the resurrection of Christ at first. Meanwhile, the two disciples on their way home to Emmaus basically decided to quit being Jesus' disciples. In spite of their human sinfulness, the risen Christ was able to see their potential spiritual conversion & decided to appear to them & reconnect with them. His judgment about them was right on as these disciples later became His strongest believers & faithful witnesses about His Good News & resurrection. Meanwhile, the risen Christ chose to reveal Himself in various settings such as a cemetery, a workplace on the shore, a locked house, & the road. If we assume that the risen Christ would appear only in certain places, He might surprise us as He did it to the early disciples.

The last spiritual lesson that this Sunday's Gospel would want us to keep in mind is that we must try to keep the risen Christ with us once we have met Him. Here is how the two disciples on the way to Emmaus reacted to their encounter with the risen Christ: "...By now they were near the village to which they were going; & He acted as if He were going farther. But, they pressed Him: 'Stay with us. It is nearly evening – the day is practically over.' So, He went in to stay with them." Evidently the two disciples were able to meet the risen Christ on the way home & recognize Him in the context of the Holy Eucharist. Once they saw & found the risen Christ, they did everything possible to keep Him with them. For they knew that the risen Christ was the keeper & wanted Him to stay with them forever. This reminds me of another Bible story whereupon Jesus drove a whole legion of evil spirits out of a possessed person & let them enter a swine herd. The whole herd then jumped off the bank of a lake & were drowned. The herd keepers went back to town & told everyone about this. They then asked Jesus to leave their town. Every time I have reflected on that story, I often wonder why the town folks would push Jesus away like that. The only reason I could come up with for those folks was because they might have thought that Jesus would cost them too much financially. They should imitate the two disciples & invite Jesus to stay with them. I hope we would see all the blessings that the risen Christ would bring us & invite Him to stay with us like the two disciples did.

My dear brothers & sisters, like Mary Magdalene, Thomas, Peter, & the rest of the disciples, the two disciples on their way home to Emmaus felt lost & overwhelmed after the death & burial of their master. Some disciples announced their encounters with the risen Christ after His burial. These two disciples did not know what to believe & decided to go back to their old way of life with lots questions on their mind. As they felt lost & hopeless, the risen Christ appeared & renewed their faith in Him through the Scriptures & the Holy Eucharist. Hopefully this story will renew our faith in Jesus when we feel lost & hopeless in our daily life. We can always reconnect with the risen Christ through Scriptures, the Holy Eucharist, & prayers.