

Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Easter

This is a perplexing Gospel. It is layered with meaning and unless we can begin to peel back these layers, there is a good chance that we will miss the depth of what is happening.

It begins with the obvious. These two disciples were rushing to get out of Jerusalem. They were so afraid they walked with their eyes downcast so that no one might recognize them.

Now joining these two disciples is Jesus. Question: why didn't they recognize Him? Wounds in His hands and feet...should have been easy to pick him out. Perhaps this is meant to be a lesson about the resurrection. St. Bernard of Clairvoux speaks wonderfully about how the resurrection creates not a body that is resuscitated but one that is remade in glory. And as a resurrected body it is different...renewe...glorified. And thank God....I for one don't want the same body back that I have now. I don't want a body that struggles with diabetes and neuropathy, that labors to breathe and finds aging to be less a blessing and more a challenge. So perhaps the reason the disciples don't recognize Christ is that while the same, He is quite different. His body is graced by glory for He is the first born of the new people of God.

Slowly He instructs these frightened disciples about all that was promised them in the Scriptures. They begin to listen and to hang onto His every word as they come to the end of their journey. Jesus intends to keep going but these disciples have other ideas as they beg Him with the words “stay with us.” Still they do not recognize him. It is only when Jesus breaks the bread that they suddenly understand . Jesus, the Son of God, who came to teach them that they have nothing to fear, is present with them.

How often in life are we afraid? How many times do we feel like running away? How many times do we keep our eyes glued to the ground because we don't want to deal with anything or anyone around us? The Word of God is trying to tell us that in all these moments, these terrifying experiences of life, Christ comes and walks with us, supports us and leads us to a deeper understanding of God's presence in our lives. But with eyes glued to the ground it is easy to miss.

It is then that the gift of the Eucharist becomes ever so clear. For every time we come to Mass the Risen Christ is revealing Himself to us and saying to us as He says over and over again: I am with you and you have nothing to fear. Rejoice and do not be afraid.