

A Homily for the 3rd Sunday of Easter from Fr Allan

If we want to know how we come into a closer friendship/relationship with Jesus Christ - if we want to know the “pattern” our lives should take if we want to grow in faith, then we should look closely at today’s gospel from St Luke. It is already printed on the parish website. It comes from Chapter 24 of St Luke and it concerns two disciples who are walking away from Jerusalem towards their home in Emmaus, a village 7 miles away. They are in grief because Jesus has been crucified. Jesus was the one in whom they had placed all their hopes. He was to be their Saviour. Now it seems that all their hopes are dashed. Their understanding of Saviour is different from Jesus’ understanding of who he is and his mission.

While they are walking home a stranger approaches them. A conversation takes place. At the end of this conversation they will realise that they had misunderstood certain things Jesus had said. Instead of being consumed by grief they come to realise that actually their hopes have been fulfilled.

The account of the disciples on the way to Emmaus has a special resonance for us today who are living with the Coronavirus. As time goes by the virus is coming near to home and more and more of us will actually know people who have died. Our grief becomes personal and very real.

Death was at the beginning of the Emmaus story. However, by the end of chapter 24 death has been overtaken by hope, by community and by life. It is good for us here and now to follow the pattern of Emmaus, to use the journey as a design for our journey in faith to God, so that we may be filled with hope, so that we come to a great realisation of the community and so that we come to know that real life/living goes on beyond the confines of this earth.

Emmaus contains something that all of the recorded appearances of the Risen Lord contain. Jesus always meets people where they are - Mary Magdalene with her tears, Thomas with his doubts, the group of disciples in the upper room with their fears. He recognises their situations/emotions. It’s the same for us - we who are reading this, those watching the streamed masses - we who are on different stages of the journey of faith. Even when we gather again in Church for mass, (we may be “one” congregation but), we will have different understandings of the Good News. Jesus comes to all of us “where we are”. He walks with us and listens to us. The time will come when he will pick up our stories and then weave his instructions into our lives.

St Luke tells us that after Jesus had listened to their story he said, “You foolish men!” This might sound harsh. It’s true that the journey of faith contains many challenges. God does challenge us. Sometimes it’s to correct us and sometimes it’s to move us on to a new place. We are told that Jesus then went through the scriptures with them. Scripture is at the heart of any journey of faith. The Church knows that this is important and this is why we celebrate “The Year of the Word”. (Even if some of it has to be postponed). We become familiar with scripture and we let it permeate our lives. We spend time with it. We try to come to an understanding of when we take it literally and when we do not. We come to know its law, its history, its poetry, its literature. Familiarity with scripture will lead to hope, to a love of community and an understanding eternal life.

Having been captivated by the company of Jesus the two disciples don’t want him to leave. They want him to stay and have a meal. Yes, it will satisfy their hunger. It might even be a

social occasion. However, now this is something more. We understand the meal at Emmaus to be an image of the Eucharist. All of the elements are there - the bread, the blessing, the breaking. They now see Jesus for who he is - the Risen Lord, the Son of God, the Saviour. Now that this has happened Jesus can no longer be simply a friend, a mentor or a teacher to a small group in and around Jerusalem. His whole being is now being offered to all people of every time and place. The Eucharist is the source and summit of our faith journey.

Cleopas and his companion are now fired up by the "Eucharist" so much so that they forget their 'isolation' - (remember that they are away from the rest of the disciples). They remember that they are a part of a community and they have this intense desire to join with them again to share their Good News. So what has this to say to us? Well, if our journey in faith hasn't come to this realisation that we, too, belong to a community and a Church, then our journey is not entirely completed. Of course even when we do reach out to others in their suffering and need, we have to know that the journey must go on. We never reach that final point when we become God's equal. However, we are fortified by the Holy Spirit. We are equipped with Scripture (the Word), the Eucharist and the Church. Even when we are in isolation - when it seems as if we are journeying alone Emmaus reminds us that we are not. In these difficult and sometimes bleak times we must take encouragement from what happened on the road to Emmaus.