

Reflection on the Gospel - Easter 3A
(Luke 24:13-35)

-Veronica Lawson, RSM

Extraordinary things can happen if we open ourselves to the presence of a stranger or “foreigner” on the road of life. That seems to be a key element in today’s gospel passage from the well-known and well-loved Emmaus story. Imagine two dejected disciples (Cleopas and possibly his wife) on Easter Day, on the road back from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus, a few kilometres away. On their journey, they encounter the risen Jesus. At first, they fail to recognise him. Their sadness at his violent death has blinded them to the significance of the women’s account of the empty tomb. It has blinded them to what is happening before their very eyes.

Jesus engages them in conversation and holds up a metaphorical mirror to their experience of loss and grief. Their hearts ‘burn’ within them as he reveals to them the meaning of his death and resurrection in the light of their sacred scriptures. Yet still they fail to recognise the one whom they have described as “a prophet mighty in deed and word.” They invite him to share a meal with them and their eyes are opened: they recognise him in the blessing and breaking of the bread they share with him. He disappears from their midst. They cannot contain the joy they have experienced in realising that Jesus is now alive and once more present to them, but in a new and transforming way.

Cleopas and partner go straight back to Jerusalem to share this good news with the other disciples. Now all the assembled disciples experience powerfully the presence of Jesus in their midst. They too pass over the women’s story; the appearance of the risen Jesus to Peter is the ground of their new faith. As the story continues beyond today’s reading, we learn that they too will share a meal with him and he will open their minds to understand the scriptures. Everything will fall into place. The fear that has paralysed them will fall away. They will not only understand Jesus’ death and resurrection in the light of the scriptures. They will be ‘clothed with power from on high’ to exercise their role as witnesses to this great mystery.

Extraordinary things can happen to those who are hospitable enough to “break bread” with “foreigners” in whom they do not immediately recognise God’s presence. If we open our hearts and our homes to those who seek a welcome on our shores, we might come to participate a little more deeply in the joy of the resurrection.