

### 3rd Sunday of Easter 2020

The Gospel passage designated for the 3rd Sunday of Easter begins: *"Two of the disciples of Jesus were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened."* Jesus, unrecognised, came and walked with them and inquired as to what they are discussing. Having listened to their lament, our Gospel passage records a somewhat exasperated Jesus respond, *"You foolish men!"* But in fact this translation of the Gospel is not quite accurate! A more correct translation is, *"Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets said!"* You may wonder if this make much of a difference, but, in fact it does. While we are told that one of the disciples was a man called Cleopas, we cannot presume that the other disciple was also a man. That person could have been a woman, and if it was a woman it had to be Cleopas' wife - a woman would not have travelled alone with a man who was not her husband!

Who might this woman might be? St. John, in his Gospel, mentions something that seems helpful. He tells us that when the soldiers had crucified Jesus, *"near the cross of Jesus stood his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas."* (Jn.19:25) Some scholars say that "Clopas" is probably the same person as "Cleopas" - and Mary was his wife. So here, on this road to Emmaus, we have a married couple, devastated by the apparent tragedy of the crucifixion, robbed of hope, making their way down the lonely and often hard road of life. Few are the married couples who do not travel this same road from time-to-time, burdened with sadness and anxiety - life seldom turns out as expected; many walk in the shoes of Cleopas and Mary! But the Gospel message to such couples is this; just as those two disciples did not travel alone, neither do you! The Lord walks with you, unrecognised perhaps, but with you, nevertheless.

It was the morning of the first Easter Sunday that the two disciples set out for Emmaus - it was the day of the Resurrection. Christians were soon to adopt the practice of gathering on every Sunday to profess faith in the Lord's Resurrection. In these strange and challenging times that we are living through, it is important to remember that Sunday is "the fundamental feastday", (SC 106), the "Day of the Lord", which we keep holy by not only remembering a past event, but by celebrating the living presence of the Risen Lord, who accompanies us, just as he accompanied

Cleopas and Mary. (cf DD 31)

As we experience the present painful breach in our normal Sunday practice, we must do everything possible to ensure that Sunday remains at the heart of our Christian life, and is indeed the Lord's Day. Sunday must not lose its fundamental meaning and become just part of the weekend, another ordinary day to fill with our own preoccupations and concerns.

At the beginning of 4th century, the Roman Emperor, Diocletian, prohibited Christians, on pain of execution, from assembling for worship on Sundays. He also ordered the sacred texts to be burnt. Disobeying the Emperor's orders, a group of 49 Christians in the city of Abitina, in North Africa, continued to meet to celebrate the Eucharist. Discovered one Sunday, they were arrested, and when questioned as to why they transgressed the Emperor's orders, they courageously answered, "We cannot live without Sunday". While we hunger to be reunited again in our churches for Sunday Mass, we must feed that hunger with two other hungers: a hunger for hearing the Word of God, and a hunger for the Eucharist.

The Gospel tells us that as Cleopas and Mary walked with Jesus, *"he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself."* And he set their hearts on fire - and we must hunger for that same fire! When the 49 Christian martyrs of Abitina were asked by the Roman magistrate if they kept the scriptures in their homes, they answered, "we keep them in our hearts". We are to keep in mind that it is Christ who speaks "when Sacred Scripture is read in the Church" (SC 7), otherwise, we may hear the word of God but fail to listen with our hearts. In this period of "liturgical famine" we can draw life from reading at home, in a spirit of prayer, the scripture readings for the coming Sunday and so grow in our yearning to hear those scriptures proclaimed in the Sunday Mass.

When the 49 martyrs of Abitina declared, "We cannot live without Sunday", they were referring to the hunger in their hearts that drew them together on that day, drew them together in communion with one another and with the Risen Lord. Jesus himself taught, *"Do not work for food that cannot last, but work for food that endures to eternal life, the kind of food the Son of Man is offering."* (Jn.6:27) When Cleopas and Mary *"pressed*

*him to stay with them"* Jesus responded by giving them a much greater gift. That encounter with the Risen Lord, intensified and deepened in *"the breaking of the bread"*, we relive in our Sunday Mass. The two disciples *"set out that instant"* to be reunited with the others in Jerusalem, and to celebrate with joy who they had become, and who we are, the Body of Christ. May the day come soon when our hunger is satisfied by Sunday communion!

*Walk with us, Lord!*

*Explain for us, so slow to believe, the Scriptures;*

*burn our hearts with the flame of your heart.*

*Fill us with yearning for the breaking of bread.*

*Stay with us, Lord, in this night of our time,*

*and fill us with new hope. **Amen.***