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Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel-St. Thomas More, NYC
April 24, 2020 - Streaming Mass
Easter 3rd Sunday of Year A 2020 Luke 24: 13-35

Life is often depicted as a journey. We make our way incorporating new experiences, all shaping the kind of persons we have become today. In today's Gospel two of Jesus' disciples are making a journey down from Jerusalem to a small town named Emmaus. As we shall see, the disciples are doing on their journey what we do in life as well. They are trying to make sense of the terrible events that have recently taken place—the tragic death of the one whom they had hoped would set Israel free. The Gospel passage says they are “debating” about the events that have taken place those past few days in Jerusalem, viz., Jesus' crucifixion and some reports from women—considered in that time as unreliable witnesses---that He has been raised from the dead. That word “debating” doesn't catch the full sense of what is going on here. The Greek root for the word here translated as “debate” is our word “ballistic.” The fact is they are going ballistic at each other. They are engaged in a very passionate debate. What could have aroused such passion and intensity? Both of them are disciples of Jesus, but it seems that each has a very different reaction to His death. Both have seen all their hopes and dreams shattered. One is probably saying, “It was a mistake ever to have followed Him. We should have stayed with the traditions of our ancestors.” And the other is saying, “I don't understand any of this, but all that He said and did has moved me more than anything else I have ever heard or seen.” What they are debating so vehemently is whether they will make sense of their lives through the teachings of Moses or the teachings of Jesus. The question for us is how will we make sense of the terrible events that we are presently living through?

Likewise, as we journey through life, we try to make sense of the absurdities, the seeming quirks of fate, the randomness of events that assail us. And, how do we do that? Very early on in life we were presented with, or later on we may have developed on our own, what might be called our life-map, i.e., a view of reality with which we began to negotiate the terrain ahead of us. These life-maps taught us what we could expect from life; what we should be afraid of; what are the terms on which the “game of life” is played; what counts as loss and what as gain; can people be trusted, or will they always let us down; is the world a safe place, or so full of dangers that I must constantly be looking over my shoulder. With the help of those maps, we construct a world for ourselves where we hope we can be safe and secure. It is the validity of those maps that is being challenged as we live through this pandemic.

Returning now to today's Gospel, we see how Jesus gently insinuates himself

into the conversation. When they speak to Him in a general way of “the things that had taken place [in Jerusalem],” He asks them, “What things?” Therein He begins the process of having these two disciples reflect on their life maps—on how they have used their religious tradition to make sense of life, how all their hopes had been set on how this Jesus would liberate their nation from the yoke of Roman oppression. But now those hopes have been dashed with His execution. Their life-map, their view of reality, the way they thought the world was supposed to work, had failed them. But now this Stranger provides them with another map. “Beginning with Moses and the prophets, Jesus interpreted for them every passage of Scripture which referred to Him.” In other words, in helping the disciples remember what the Scriptures were actually saying, in helping them recover a truer sense of the past, and thereby a truer sense of the present, as well, Jesus enables them to plot a new course in life with a revised map. This revised map will be large enough and accurate enough to embrace the unexpected tragedy of His crucifixion and resurrection. He helps them put together the shattered pieces of their lives by helping them see how their story can be enlarged, by their story becoming part of His story.

We may have tried—perhaps rather successfully for the most part—to shield ourselves from the “tragic sense of life” (Miguel de Unamuno). Religion may have even played a part, as the glue that kept all the pieces together. That was the map we followed to make our way through life. It is much more difficult now when the person we cross on the street--if we must leave the security of our home--is perceived as much as a threat as a neighbor. Because we have constructed a comfortable middleclass lives for ourselves, we may have come to think of the world as a safe place. Now we know that it isn't. The fear, the isolation, the uncertainty that grips so many less fortunate has invaded our lives. How do we make sense of it all?

Just as Jesus came to the disciples in the midst of their confusion and panic, gently reinterpreting what they thought they had all figured out, so He continues to come to us to expand our horizons, to provide us with a better life-map. Again, He invites us to view our own personal stories in the context of His story, and most specifically in the context of His death and resurrection. He wants us to see how compassion, caring and courage are the antidotes for indifference, isolation and ignorance. He wants us to accept the cross as the path to resurrection, and to see that even in the worst of tragedies, there is still some blessing. And, finally, He wants us to see how, as with the disciples in today's Gospel, He has been with us all along the way of our life's journey, even if we did not recognize His presence. He invites us to walk along the road of life with Him, opening us to a fuller life, a richer life. The question is will I accept that invitation?