

The Third Sunday of Easter
April 30, 2017

We have heard today the story about two disciples who are sad, lost and confused about the events that have taken place in Jerusalem with the death of Jesus and then finding that His tomb was empty. This was not what the ending they had hoped for when they began to follow Jesus. In fact, they had become what we might call anti-evangelists. Evangelists are people who proclaim the Gospel, the good news of Jesus death and resurrection for the salvation of all who follow him. Like Peter in our first reading from Acts.

But these two disciples did not understand the significance of Jesus' necessary suffering so that He could be raised in glory. So these two anti-evangelists were on their way to Emmaus not to proclaim the Good News of Jesus resurrection but to announce the *bad news* of Jesus' death and missing body.

While they are walking to deliver their not-so good-news, Jesus joined them to help them understand what had really happened and though they did not recognize him at first, their hearts were aflame as Jesus explained how all of the events that unfolded in Jerusalem had been foretold in Scripture.

The disciples were so moved by this stranger in their midst that they invited Jesus to stay with them for dinner where they finally and fully recognized Jesus in the blessing and breaking of bread. As a result of finally recognizing Jesus in the Eucharist,

they became authentic evangelists and they would go back to Jerusalem to spread the Good News they had just experienced.

It's a wonderful story and we have heard it many times, but here is the genius of Luke's story. One of the disciple's names we know is Cleopas. Luke, however, doesn't tell us anything about the second disciple. He could be anybody. He could even be a she...young or old. And because we are given no details about the second disciple, we can make the unknown disciple's story our story and in this way Luke invites us to enter into the story and so we become the second disciple. It's a wonderful way of demonstrating how the Bible can become truly interactive.

We all know there are times in our lives where we feel sad, lonely, abandoned and worried about an uncertain future. It is in the middle of those difficult moments that we can make the unknown disciple's story our story.

We can remember that Jesus is always willing to walk with us and He wants us to tell Him all of the things that trouble us in our life because when we unite our suffering to His, we find healing and hope. There are many ways we can make this story our own.

We can make the unknown disciple's story our story when the stranger enters our lives or visitors come to our homes or to our church and we respond by offering the gift of our hospitality with love and compassion in the same way that the disciples offered to share their meal with Jesus. By this simple act of charity, they encountered the presence of the risen Christ. We ought to be eager for each opportunity to follow

their example so we can experience again and again the risen Lord every day of our lives, especially in those who are considered to be the least of His brothers and sisters.

We can make the disciple's story our own when we engage the Sacred Scriptures and allow our hearts to burn with joy in the same way theirs did as Jesus explained to them the meaning of the passages. We immerse ourselves in Sacred Scripture by praying regularly with the Bible or perhaps becoming involved with a Bible study, or becoming a member of the RCIA team or teaching a PSR class. Or maybe we can make their story our own by listening to God's invitation to discern or encourage a vocation to the priesthood or religious life.

And perhaps most importantly, we can make this story our story as we approach the altar of the Eucharist with the same joy as the disciples did when they recognized the living presence of Christ truly with them in the breaking of bread. Such was their elation that they immediately went back to Jerusalem, amidst all of the turmoil and danger of that place to proclaim the Good News that their Savior had indeed risen and that the fear of night, darkness and death would no longer have power over them.

And finally, we can make this story our own when we leave this place to go out into the world and proclaim with joy the reality of Jesus in our lives. Luke has shown us that by making his story our story, we really can be transformed by the real presence of Jesus as He comes to us in both Word and Sacrament and then each of us can become evangelists of the Good News in our homes, at work, at school or anywhere we may be where people are longing to hear Good News.