

# 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter – April 25/26, 2020 – Reflection

“That very day, the first day of the week, two of Jesus’ disciples were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.”

## The Gospel of Luke in the 24<sup>th</sup> Chapter

“Their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him!”

People often enough come up to me and ask, “Do you remember me? Do you know my name?” I know it’s kind of a test to see whether or not I have a good memory, whether or not they were really important to me, but I’m really tempted to reply, “Why? Are you lost? Have you forgotten your name?”

Many years ago, I had a very good friend who was studying to become a priest. We became close, got to know one another’s families, vacationed together, ate many meals and drank many beverages in one another’s company, and after he was ordained, visited one another in the rectories of the parishes we were assigned several times. Close friends, right? Well, I admit that as the years went by, the distance of our assignments ... we served in different dioceses in New England ... led to a distance in our friendship, a limit to our contact and communication.

When I was forty, I was named to my first pastorate. I looked a lot younger than my years back then, so I thought I needed to look a little older if I was to gain the respect of the parishioners in my new parish. So, I decided to grow some facial hair ... not a full beard, mind you, just a sort of mustache and goatee kinda contraption. Not too long after I debuted my new look, I was at a gathering in Boston with some friends when across the room I saw my old priest friend. I went up to him and said "Hi!" and I called him by name. He looked at me like I had two heads or was some sort of mad stalker. He had no idea who the heck I was! So I decided to string him along for a bit ... I told him all sorts of things I knew about him - names of people in his family, where he'd gone to school, what his favorite drink was, who his friends were ... I thought sure something would click and light would dawn and he'd remember me, his old and dear friend. Instead he just got more and more flustered and looked like he wanted to call security! Finally, one of the people I had come with joined us. I introduced him to my close, dear friend and then I introduced MYSELF to my close, dear friend, "Hi Terry, I'm Danny!" as I walked back to my table leaving him mouth agape, face reddened with embarrassment.

Jesus' two disciples walking on the road that led away from Jerusalem were upset, crushed by what had happened in the city and on Calvary hill just days ago. Their friend, their hero, their Lord, had been killed in the most shameful manner. The hopes for the future Kingdom were dashed and it seemed like they had been fools to be so duped by one who surely now wasn't who they thought He was. Besides all that, they were afraid that if they didn't get out of the city, the same fate would await them ... guilt by association, y'know.

A Stranger begins to walk with them ... it is Jesus, but their sadness, their ruined expectations, their knowledge of the laws of nature, their concern for their own hides, their certainty of knowing what's best for them, don't let them recognize Him. It's only when He talks about the Word of God with them, only when He breaks bread with them, that the scales fall from their eyes and they see the Stranger as no stranger at all. He is their friend, their hope, their Master, their Lord ... He is Jesus Risen from the dead!!

These past many weeks, we have been living in a world few of us hardly recognize. We've been away from family and friends, away from work and recreation, away from sports and theater and fine dining and taverns and classrooms and meetings and travels. Easter hardly looked like Easter ... no church, no communion, no hugs and handshakes and reconnecting. With all of that missing, it might have seemed as if God were missing too, as if Jesus and hope and life were swallowed up in a tomb of virus and fear and distance. Where can I find my Lord in these crazy times? Find Him in the word. Dust off that bible you have and open to one of the gospels and read the greatest story ever told ... Matthew, Mark, Luke or John ... "Were not our hearts burning within us as He spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?"

And though we cannot now gather around the table of the Lord to recognize Him in the breaking of the bread, we can gather with the families we are home with, we can gather with our faith families remotely, we can break bread together, even if from a distance, and we can know that "wherever two or three gather in my name ... even if they be more than six feet apart, gloved and masked, even then ... there am I in their midst." Jesus is in my family I take for granted. Jesus is in the worker I never noticed. Jesus is in the host I thought just a piece

of bread which I cannot now receive. Jesus is in the Word I didn't have time to read or hear. And He is here, right here ... do you see ... do you know who He is ... do you remember His name ... Jesus.

"Were not our hearts on fire as He spoke to us ... stay with us, Lord ... stay with us, Jesus!"