

CHURCH OF ST. PATRICK

53 ST. PATRICK'S PLACE STATEN ISLAND, NY 10306

April 26, 2020

Dear Parishioner,

Eight years ago Msgr. Richard Guastella and I went with Cardinal Dolan and some other priests to the Holy Land. One of the stops on that trip was at Emmaus, where the Risen Christ had sat down at the table with the two disciples, where He took the bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to them, where they came to know in their hearts that He was alive. It was a perfect place for us to join in a celebration of the Mass, to remember that the Risen Christ was here 2000 years ago, but to remind ourselves that He is still alive, He is still here as we celebrate His presence in the Eucharist.

This Sunday's Gospel: Luke's account of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, is another of the resurrection appearances, but it is also an account about the Eucharist and how we come to know Jesus in the "breaking of the bread." The two disciples are dejected, broken men as they walk seven miles from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. They had followed Jesus during his ministry right up until that momentous day, Palm Sunday, when Jesus rode in triumph into the city. But then they watched as everything fell apart and Jesus was arrested, tried and executed on a cross. They were guilty because they stood by and did nothing to stop His death. They were angry because the leaders had killed Him out of jealousy. They were confused because they thought Jesus was the Messiah – but he couldn't have been because God wouldn't let that happen to His Messiah. They had given up everything to follow Him – but now they were going home.

They were so wrapped up in what they were talking about and what had happened that they didn't even recognize Jesus walking along with them. He asked them what had happened and He began to explain to them what it all meant by showing them that the prophecies of the Scriptures had come true in the person of Jesus. Everything was happening just the way it was meant to happen. God's will was being done despite, and even because of, Pilate and the Jewish Leaders. By the time Jesus was finished speaking with them they had HOPE: maybe the women were right, maybe He was alive. That Seven Mile Walk was their Liturgy of the Word. The scriptures came to life through the inspired preaching of Jesus. Now they dared to hope, they were on the verge of believing that Jesus was alive.

Then Jesus went upstairs with them. He took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them – and in that Liturgy of the Eucharist they knew, they experienced the Risen Lord. Their ENCOUNTER WITH THE LORD changed them. They went running back to Jerusalem to tell the apostles: Jesus is Risen!

But that was only the beginning. Once they had "Encountered the Risen Lord" their lives could never be the same again. We can be certain that their announcement of the Good News to the apostles was not the end of their mission but the beginning of spreading the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

We as Catholics “Encounter the Risen Lord” at Mass when we hear the Word that the Lord is speaking to us, a word that speaks to the deepest longings and the most pressing needs of our hearts. This time of testing for us is a moment when we might be more open, more ready, more willing to hear what God is telling us about our situation and our lives. He is telling us, like He did the disciples that even though the situation seems bleak and hopeless God is walking along with us and there is Light at the end of this dark tunnel.

We as Catholics “Encounter the Risen Lord” at Mass when we sit down at the Eucharistic Meal with the Lord and receive not only the knowledge that He is Alive but the strength of His Risen Life in the Eucharist. He gives us, as He gave the disciples, strength for the journey, the strength to rise up and live the lives we were meant to live: lives of resurrected peace and joy and love.

The “Encounter with the Risen Lord” is not meant to leave us the same as we were in our former lives on the road. It is meant to transform us and make us more like Jesus Himself.

If we haven’t gotten to the point where we have had that “Encounter Moment,” where we have been “Born Again,” where the Risen Christ has come alive within us, maybe that is why He is giving us this opportunity to become all that we were meant to be. Maybe we are supposed to take this time of isolation as a time when we can truly “Encounter the Risen Lord.” People go away on retreats, sometimes month-long retreats, to allow the Risen Lord to awaken them to His Presence and fill them with His strength. Even though we haven’t chosen to do this, now that we find ourselves trapped in our houses, we can take the opportunity that the Lord is giving us to “Encounter Him.”

If our encounters with Jesus haven’t changed us to the extent that the two disciples from Emmaus were changed maybe now is the time to ask God for that transformation, to tell Him that we are ready to go the extra mile, that we are ready for Him to use us in a powerful way.

This is another one of those times in our lives when we make an important choice: After having heard Jesus words of hope on the road, are we going to let Him continue on His way, or are we going to invite Him upstairs and have the ENCOUNTER with Him that will change our lives and the lives of those around us.

God bless you, heal you, and keep you safe,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jeffrey B. Conway". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

Jeff Conway, Pastor

JPC/smb