



From the Pastor's Desk:

Reflection on Hope and New Life After the Easter Feasts

- PART 1

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Lessons of the Resurrection witnesses: We are still basking in the afterglow of the Resurrection and the Easter feasts we have celebrated. The Scriptural readings of this season are filled with powerful encounters and images of hope and new life. No matter how we look at the Easter stories, they present us a very fragile beginning for a religion that has lasted almost 2,000 years, and yet that is where so many of us continue to focus our energy: on that tomb, on that morning, on what did or did not happen there and how to explain it to anyone who does not happen to believe it too. No one has ever seen it happen, which is why it helps us to remember that no one saw it happen on Easter morning either.

What happened in the tomb was entirely between Jesus and God. For the rest of us, Easter began the moment the gardener said, "Mary!" and she knew who he was. That is where the miracle happened and goes on happening — not in the tomb but in the encounter with the living Lord. Those appearances are what the Resurrection is all about, and the experiences of those first Easter witnesses can teach us much about what it means to be true witness.

Lessons on the Road: the Disciples of Emmaus: Let us consider first the lessons learned from the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. This beloved Gospel story from St. Luke: (24:13-35) is a very human story, full of pathos; stylized in pattern, suggesting a Eucharistic celebration (vv. 30-32). The disciples come with their questions and doubts (vv. 13-24); the Scriptures are recited (v. 27); words of clarification and instruction are exchanged on the road (vv. 25-27); and finally, the moment of recognition comes in the context of a meal (v. 31). The narrative concludes with the disciples' return to the community in Jerusalem, only to find that the good news of the Resurrection has already been made known to those who patiently waited for Jesus in the Holy City.

Jesus approached the disciples in their blindness on the road and led them to sight. As soon as they recognize him after the bread is broken, he disappears from their midst. They are both able to look back over the past few hours and see how Jesus slowly brought them back to faith (v. 32) and helped them discover the meaning of the Messiah's suffering, death and Resurrection.

Cleopas and his companion slowly journeyed through the darkness and desperation of faith. They had to discover anew God's Word and God's Envoy: the Risen Lord. Their initial sadness, non-understanding and disbelief are transformed into joy as they eagerly listened to the explanation of the Scriptures on the road, and as their eyes were opened at table in Emmaus. The "Good News" descended from their head to their heart, and they experienced that strange and wonderful feeling of their hearts gradually being on fire.

The journey motif of this passage is not only a matter of the distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus, but also of the painful and gradual journey of words that must descend from the head to the heart; of a coming to faith, of a return to a proper relationship with the stranger who is none other than Jesus the Lord. The Evangelist Luke's picture of the dejected disciples can help us to recognize how difficult the struggle is for the world, and for each of us to yield to God's purposes. Jesus' disciples are unable to understand that he must suffer, and this failure is connected with a series of other personal failings evidenced in the Scripture stories.

The Lord always listens to us and is always there. It is part of the Lord's pedagogy with regard to his disciples to always listen to them, especially when times are hard, when one has fallen, experiences doubt, disillusionment and frustration. His words make the hearts of the disciples "burn", they remove them from the darkness of sadness and desperation, provoking in them the desire to remain with him: Stay with us, Lord.

The dejected disciples begin to change only when they are enlightened by the risen Christ, who explains from the Sacred Scriptures how God works in a resistant world and among resistant, sinful people like us. It is indeed an ironic victory because the forces of rejection and experiences of suffering and sinfulness, themselves, become the means by which God's purpose is accomplished in the world! For Cleopas and his unnamed companion on that first Easter, their journey was a gradual, painstaking process requiring a careful remembering and re-articulation of the events of salvation history found in the Scriptures, along with an experience of the Risen Lord. It is no less the same for 21st century Christians who continue to interpret the Scriptures in this day and age, and move from faith-filled insights to a proclamation and lived experience of the One who is truly risen from the dead.

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May God +bless you, and yours, now and forever.

Father Anthony