

Wednesday of Easter Week – Year A– April 27, 2011 - Homily

Acts 3:1-10; Psalm 105:1-8; Luke 24:13-25

Susan E. Wilmot

You know that wonderful warm, cozy feeling of sinking down into a deep warm bath, perhaps with a few bubbles, music, or candles? Or just relaxing with the steam rising around you, and every pore in your body opening up to the moisture? It's one of life's little luxuries to indulge in "me" time – especially if we're feeling stressed or tired. In tonight's Gospel reading, two of the disciples are leaving Jerusalem and are headed to a village called Emmaus. While the site of that village has not been determined, the name Emmaus actually means "warm baths". Yet there's something about the name that seems to be appropriate for these two disciples. They may not have been particularly relaxed, but they are rather foggy in their thinking, and very much focused on their own thoughts and questions, their own grief and distress about what has happened. Perhaps most importantly, they are in many respects, simply going their own way, despite what Mary Magdalene has told the disciples about going to Galilee to meet Jesus. The two are so wrapped up in themselves and their own concerns around the events of the past few days that they don't recognize Jesus, the risen Lord, even when he comes near and asks what they're talking about as they walk along the road.

By Luke's account, Cleopas and the other disciple's "eyes are kept from recognizing him". Yet as they tell their sad story to the stranger on the road, it's apparent that they know that Jesus is risen, just as the angels told the women at the tomb, and even as the women have witnessed to the disciples. They are looking at Jesus, but not really seeing Him, and we have to wonder how many of us do the same every day. As we begin our own joyous reflections on the meaning of Easter, and how we embrace the gift of resurrection life today, let's think about times in our own lives when we may have encountered the stranger, Jesus, without recognizing Him. It could have been a simple thing like help in the supermarket getting something from one of those high shelves, or even one of those low shelves. It may have been someone whose path crossed ours at a particular time in our lives. In hindsight, it turns out to be the right person at the right time, and even if we've since lost touch, we'll always remember the kindness and love that they shared with us. We are Christ's hands and feet in the world now, and so Jesus comes alongside us most often in relationship with others – family and friends, neighbors and strangers. We never know how the Lord will help us or walk with us for a while, talk with us and open our eyes.

Much of what we learn from Cleopas and the other disciple's conversation with the stranger on the road applies to us today. The first lesson is always to listen carefully to God's directions, so that we can stay on the right path. It's fascinating that the village Emmaus has never been definitively identified. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus tells the disciples to go to Galilee. In Luke and John, Jesus comes to the disciples at Jerusalem. Either way, there's no instruction to the disciples to head to their home town or village after their Passover visit to Jerusalem and the Lord's passion. Given the Gospel accounts, the disciples were to go together to Galilee, or, as we will hear next Sunday, Jesus comes to them in Jerusalem. After our Lenten focus and disciplines, and our joyous celebration of Easter Day, we too may now be tempted to get back to doing our own thing, or going our own way, just like Cleopas and the other disciple. Tonight's reading suggests that that is truly like taking a walk to Emmaus, and not what God intends for us after we have come so far in our spiritual journeys. In fact, now is

the time to consolidate our practices and the growth that God has helped us to achieve by continuing to listen closely to God's direction.

If Lent is a period of self-examination and inward reflection, then the second aspect of this lesson on the road to 'warm baths' or self-indulgence is to turn our attention outward towards the Lord and others, so that we may be able to see the risen Christ in our lives, the life of this community, and the lives of others. How might we do this? According to the reading, Jesus opens the scriptures to the two wanderers as they walk together. The fifty days of the Easter season is a wonderful time when we can consolidate our own spiritual growth and renewal by continuing to open the Scriptures. It's so tempting just to sigh with relief that the busy-ness of Lent, Holy Week and Easter Sunday are over, but Jesus says that's "foolishness". We're invited to kindle the flame of love and joy in our hearts, and help it to grow brighter with the passion inspired in us by Jesus' passion and resurrection. Opening God's word is a great way to help us understand more about our mission in and to the world in Christ's service.

The third aspect of this lovely story is recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread and the prayers. Again, these first days of the Easter season can seem like a time when we've done a lot of church, and feel like we can kick back for a while. Yet the reading from Luke tells us another story. The disciples immediately offer Jesus, the stranger on the road, hospitality by urging Him to stay with them and share fellowship and a meal. That is precisely what we do here each Sunday and Wednesday in our worship to God, and gathering for Holy Communion. In Easter Sunday's Gospel reading, Jesus tells Mary not to cling to Him. One way we can understand this is as Jesus helping Mary to understand that He is always with her and with us in the fellowship of the Body of Christ, and especially in the breaking of the bread, which is the sacrament of Holy Communion, instituted by our Lord Jesus on the night He was betrayed. This is confirmed for us, as the disciples recognize Jesus the moment that He shares a blessing over the meal and breaks bread with them. It is at that point that He simply vanishes from sight. The disciples realize that the risen Lord will always be with them in the breaking of the bread and in fellowship. With that recognition, they return quickly to Jerusalem to share their joy at seeing the risen Lord with the other disciples.

Finally, it's okay to take time for ourselves. After all, by God's grace we all need to have Sabbath time to rest and simply *be* in God's presence without *doing* anything. What we have to watch out for is allowing ourselves to turn away from God for a prolonged period of time, losing our focus by letting our gaze wander away, going off on our own paths without listening to the Lord first, or becoming overly self-indulgent. The glory of the resurrection is the beginning of new life, and a new journey in Christ. It's a time to reflect on the meaning of resurrection living, to put into action all that we've learned through our Lenten walk, and in the Easter message, so that we can continue to grow in Christ and serve the risen Lord in the world. Here are some thoughts to ponder this week. Where is the Lord leading us? How is the risen Christ seeking our help in sharing the Good News? What are our next steps along the path of faith and hope?

Amen.