Third week of Easter Reflection

The story of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus we hear in today’s Gospel had just experienced a great loss. They have left the community of the downhearted and confused band of disciples who were afraid and bewildered over what had happened to Jesus on Good Friday. The two are walking away from Jerusalem… away from the place where their hopes were shattered! Disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despair and death all these words sum up how the two disciples were feeling as they trudged up the road toward Emmaus.

The Master they had loved and followed had been horribly put to death – a cruel and degrading death on a cross. Jesus had been made a public spectacle, exposed to the jeers of all who passed by. now Jesus lay dead in a sealed tomb. Their hopes were dashed; the dream was over! The two despondent disciples walking the road to Emmaus summed up the situation very neatly when they said, "We had hoped that he would be the one who was going to set Israel free!"

Human hope is a fragile thing, and when it withers, it is difficult to revive. We need to note the number of people who take their own life because despair and discouragement have sucked the last bit of hope out of their lives. When someone you love and care for is overtaken by a serious illness, which goes on, and on, despair sets in. It almost becomes impossible to hope for recovery.

As the two men walked along, a stranger joined them. This was going to be the most significant walk in their whole lives. The stranger asked them what they were discussing. And so, they poured out their story to someone who seemed willing to listen. They tell the stranger all about their hopes and their disappointments. He simply provides a listening ear. As the three men talk of their misery and disappointment, the stranger walks with them. We know that the stranger was Jesus.

Isn’t that a great picture – Jesus walking along the road with his despondent and confused disciples sharing their troubles? When disappointment, doubt, disillusionment, defeat, discouragement, despondency, depression, and despair fill our lives, Jesus is the unseen "stranger" walking alongside us, listening to us, and if we are willing to hear his voice, revealing himself to us.

As the two disciples talked about the cross, their bewilderment and sorrow, Jesus reassured them and helped them. Luke tells us, "Jesus explained to them what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writings of all the prophets".

The two-hour walk to Emmaus must have seemed like five minutes. The two disciples could feel the despondency and sorrow they felt in their hearts change into understanding
and hope as the "stranger" explained that Jesus’ death was a part of God’s great plan of salvation.

When disillusionment, depression and defeat dominate our lives, Jesus walks with us just as he walked with the two men on the road to Emmaus. He points us to God's Word of promise in the Bible that tells us again that we are God's dearly loved children and that he will stand by us through thick and thin. He turns our despair into hope.

The two disciples asked the "stranger" to stop with them as the day was drawing to a close, and at the evening meal he "took the bread, and said the blessing; then he broke the bread and gave it to them”. Suddenly it dawned on them who the stranger was. It was their Master raised from the dead. Jesus himself had ministered to them in their sadness. Now they knew why a change had come over them as they walked on the road. They now knew why their despondent hearts had been changed to hearts filled with hope and renewed faith. Jesus had revealed himself to them in his Word and through the sacrament of breaking of the bread.

Then they asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning in us when he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?". Because of Jesus’ love for his despondent disciples, graciously he came and walked with them on the road to Emmaus. Graciously he cleared away the fog of confusion; he showed to them the heart of God and his plan of salvation, and finally he revealed himself to them – he was alive, risen from the dead.

The road to Emmaus is a symbol of the Christian life. This is story about the meaning of Easter for us. It enables us to see the risen Lord walk with us giving hope and joy, when all we see is disappointment, discouragement and despair. It enables us to see the world, not as a place of death, decay, and defeat, but as a place waiting, groaning toward God's final victory.

“God walking with us” is a recurrent theme in the Bible: he walked with Adam and Eve in the garden; he walked with the Israelites in the desert; he walked with the exiles; he walked the shore of Galilee healing the sick and comforting the anguished. God still walks with us in our times of anguish and despair, confusion and pain, when we cannot make sense of the events of our life and our world.

This story about the walk to Emmaus is our story for everyday life, today in this present context of Covid pandemic. Let us remember we are not walking alone. The unseen "stranger", the risen Jesus is walking with us. When our Emmaus road is filled with discouragement and despair, let us walk it with Jesus. Walking with Jesus, our road will become a great highway of companionship, conversation, belief and hope.

*May you and I be aware of God walking with us on our “Emmaus” journeys! opening the scriptures and breaking the bread.*