

FROM THE PASTOR'S PRINTER

BURNING HEARTS, NOT HEARTBURN

The road to Emmaus story is not simply an account of the risen Jesus appearing, but really, as all resurrection stories are, one of encountering the risen Lord. Simple appearance can be one-sided; "I saw, but there was no interaction," or I appeared, but there was no response." Encounter is a dynamic interaction between people which, depending on the nature of the encounter, leaves its mark. Let's look at how this unfolds on the road.

Cleopas and friend see the death of Jesus and the purported resurrection as random acts in the world. One may assume from their escape to Emmaus – a town far enough from Jerusalem to get away from it all, yet close enough not to be an arduous trek – is because they do not see the hand of God in the Passion, but rather that evil has the upper hand, and the news of the risen Christ is too much to handle. It would be much easier to accept if they had personally seen the risen Christ, or at least if others did, but all they know is that the body is missing and the admittedly wild angelic message of resurrection. It is human nature to abhor suffering, and it is logical that these two disciples are getting the "heck out of Dodge" so to speak. It is interesting, though, that the disciples do not seem to remember the predictions of Jesus about these very matters, teachings he repeated over and over again. Maybe to appreciate their situation we need only to look at ourselves to see how we deal with the crises in our own lives. We have the same teaching of Christ as did they, and we have heard it many more times than they have. "Bear the cross with Christ; only if you die with Him can you rise with Him, only if you endure with Him can you reign with Him." Yet in our living we often face the sufferings of this life with the attitude that God is short-shrifting us with suffering or death. After all, we believe in, we keep his rules (well, pretty well), we are nice people, and this is what we get?!?

It is only through conversation with the only true Victim of these horrors that Cleopas and associate come to see these events in their true light. Jesus, who is the Priest offering Himself and the Victim offered in

this cosmic Sacrifice, now acts as Shepherd and Teacher patiently re-explaining (didn't they take notes the first time?) all that He had taught them through the Law and the Prophets. By listening to the unrecognized Lord the coldness of despair turns to the fire of hope. They did not get it at all the first time Jesus taught them, but on the second round, the pieces were beginning to come together. To their credit, they could have politely urged the teaching traveler to let them escape without a lecture; rather, they opted to listen. In our lives, we too can opt to listen for the truth that anchors us in the turbulent seas of life. We recall an image of hope gained from faith, and turn with a "new ear" to hear God speak. Usually, we do not get all the pieces of the puzzle as we struggle for meaning in times of trial, but we can hold onto the anchor of Christ's word to keep our lives from drowning in chaos.

Ultimately, though, what puts all the pieces together is not simply "knowing the story," but finding that the story is told by no one less than Christ himself. In the breaking of the bread Cleopas and companion recognize that in the confusion and clarification, it is Christ who has been not only been speaking with them, but also walking with them. Our God is not a God who simply gives an explanation and leaves us on our own to figure it out. Our God is One who is with us at our dullest and our sharpest, in our pain and in our joy. As they came to recognize Him in the breaking of the bread, so we too are assured that Christ is with us – in fact **within** us through the Eucharistic act.

As if Christ's teaching and presence were not enough in times of trial, the God who loves us to death and through death to new life speaks and makes Himself present to us all the time. We have only to listen and receive every Sunday at Mass where the Word of God is spoken and the Body and Blood of Christ given for us and to us. When we make this gift a non-negotiable part of our life, we are anchored to the Lord and see more clearly His hand in all we encounter: joy and sorrow, sickness and health, good times and bad, life and death. Why wait until there is conflict and pain to find the abiding love and strength of the Lord. It is here for us always.

*"Were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us and opened the Scriptures to us?"
And they recounted how the Lord was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*