

Wednesday in the Octave of Easter

Luke 24: 13-35

Homily by Jason Downer, S.J.

Pope Francis has been using the image of darkness and the storm at sea to talk about the current situation that is affecting all of us. There is a lot of truth in that as we face all of this uncertainty. Even now, in the Octave of Easter, it's hard to feel that normal joy of this season because even though we know, we trust, we believe that Jesus has risen, it might not feel like it. The road to Emmaus has long been one of my favorite stories in the Gospels because I love the model of Jesus simply walking with two disciples as they grieve, but they don't recognize him. They spend the whole day with him and their eyes are only opened at the breaking of the bread and then he is gone. And when they look back on their time, they remember that their hearts were burning with desire while they spoke to each other,

Our current situation offers me a new way of looking at the Road to Emmaus. Imagine that you're out for a walk. Keeping in mind the precautions in place, you are wearing a mask and making sure you're not walking near anyone. Suddenly someone is walking next to you, he seems to be settling into a pace that matches yours, he's clearly not worried about physical distancing. You look over and see that it is Jesus, your heart burns with desire because you recognize him right away. He looks at your face and asks "what are you thinking about as you walk along?" and you reply "Are you the only one who does not know of the things that have taken place here these days?" Jesus looks at you with love, like he did to the rich young man, so you continue. "There is a pandemic that has spread around the world. We have to stay six feet away from each other. We have closed all the schools. Millions of people are unemployed. We have to wear masks when we go outside. The virus spreads so quickly, people get so sick, and so many people have died all alone without loved ones. There is so much confusion. There is so much uncertainty of when we'll be able to return to the way things were before. I'm scared."

During all of this Jesus just continues walking and listening. He doesn't try to explain away what's happening. At this moment, he walks with us and listens to the lament and receives it with love. Jesus receives it with love because what we offer is an authentic telling of our

current story, we don't need to put on a brave face. Jesus just wants to walk with us at this moment. All last week, we walked with Jesus in his passion, we accompanied him as he was arrested, tortured, and crucified. Now in his glory, in his defeat over death, Jesus walks with us in this time of uncertainty.

For me, that image of accompaniment is what I need from Jesus because it helps illuminate those moments where He has been present even though I didn't recognize him. It's the first step of the examen, naming the specific things we're grateful for that day. That funny email I received from a friend...my eyes were opened. The call from a loved one that comes at the perfect time...my eyes were opened. This easter season, we're all on the road to Emmaus, we're feeling a little uncertain, maybe even a little scared, but Jesus walks with us and continues to reveal himself to us in ways we don't expect or understand.

Below is an image of the Road to Emmaus that I recently came across that I find especially beautiful. *Spend some time with this Gospel story today and as you look back on these past few weeks, where has Jesus been walking with you? Where have your eyes been opened? In which moments has your heart burned with desire? How do you want to walk with Jesus in the weeks ahead?*

