

26 April 2020

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter (A)

Acts 2:14, 22-33; Psalm 16; 1 Peter 1:17-21; Luke 24:13-35

*“Were not our hearts **burning** within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?”*

After my first year and a half in seminary, I learned one of my most important lessons: to have a pencil in hand whenever I read a book. From there on out, I would mark up the books I had to read (or attempt to read), underlining important sentences and writing notes to myself in the margins. So every so often, when I pick one of those books off my shelves now and reread certain passages, I look at what I underlined and wrote, and sometimes I find other sentences I would underline now, or make different notes based on how passages would move me now.

On January 26, a long three months ago, we as a Church observed the first “Sunday of the Word of God”, which Pope Francis instituted as an invitation for all of us to recommit ourselves to a deeper devotion to God's word in the Scriptures. In his letter instituting it, Pope Francis said: “We should never take God’s word for granted, but instead let ourselves be nourished by it, in order to acknowledge and live fully our relationship with him and with our brothers and sisters.”

And Pope Francis referred to our gospel reading, the disciples' encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus. He said, "The relationship between the Risen Lord, the community of believers and sacred Scripture is essential to our identity as Christians. Without the Lord who opens our minds to them, it is impossible to understand the Scriptures in depth. Yet the contrary is equally true: without the Scriptures, the events of the mission of Jesus and of his Church in this world would remain incomprehensible. Hence, Saint Jerome could rightly claim: 'Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.'"

At every celebration of the Eucharist, we are nourished by the very word of God, the word that Jesus himself gives to us. After every reading, we say, "Thanks be to God", or "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ", giving voice to what we believe: that we are fed by what we hear and listen to. And this is a living word, a word that speaks to us ever new, in every season of life.

The disciples on the road to Emmaus is the story of us, of all believers who find themselves confused or questioning on the other side of Jesus's death and resurrection.

The two disciples not only talk on the way to Emmaus, they debate and argue with each other, perhaps about who Jesus was and what they were supposed to do now. But in the midst of their discussion, Jesus appears to them and joins their conversation. He plays it coy at first, asking them what they're talking about, and after they relay their disillusionment that Jesus apparently did not fulfill their hopes for redemption, Jesus says, “How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”

Then Jesus interprets all of the Scriptures to them, all that prophesied his mission, all while they continue on their journey. When they arrive at Emmaus, the disciples plead with him, “Stay with us.” And Jesus does—not only that, he breaks bread for them, and then they recognize who he truly is. They say to each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?”

In this story we see the elements of our celebration of the Eucharist: Jesus himself opens the Scriptures for us in the Liturgy of the Word, and then he breaks bread for us in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The important point is that it is Jesus himself who nourishes us, with his words.

The fact that Jesus sheds new light on the Scriptures that referred or prophesied about him was also the experience of the first disciples after Jesus's resurrection. They had to go back and reread the Hebrew Scriptures in a new way, now open to whether certain passages could have new meaning in light of Jesus's death and resurrection.

This is what Peter does in our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles. He basically gives a sermon to a Jewish audience on Psalm 16, which was also our responsorial psalm today. He reinterprets the psalm as referring to Jesus in his death and resurrection: “because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption.”

The Scriptures, as the inspired word of God in human language, are not just historical literature, interesting writings from the distant past. No, the Spirit of God continually speaks to us through them, nourishing us, challenging us, comforting us.

If we are in close contact with the Scriptures, both through the Mass readings, as well as our own personal devotional reading, then we can be in relationship with the living God through them. Thus the Scriptures, our bibles, can be a sort of sacrament of God's presence for us. If you have a bible at home, put it somewhere prominent, as a sort of throne of God's presence, a reminder of your relationship with him. But don't let it simply stay there and gather dust: open it up and pray with it, starting with the Mass readings. And don't be afraid to have a pencil in hand, to underline words or phrases that move you a certain way, or perhaps move you in a new way depending on your season of life.

If we listen to God's word with the ear of our hearts, then we can truly be fed by him. Our hearts may burn within us as he speaks to us, and he may stay with us along our journeys.