

THEIR EYES WERE OPENED IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD (Luke 24. 13-35)

This gospel story is very familiar to us. It happened on the Easter day. Two friends were walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus. We don't know for sure who these disciples were (though traditions says many things) – but Luke mentions one name – Cleopas. While they were walking, Jesus gets close - and walks with them... and listens to their conversation. They were talking about the things happened in Jerusalem – the arrest, torture, crucifixion, and death of Jesus. They looked very sad and disappointed – because they hoped that this 'mighty prophet' Jesus would redeem Israel. They, then said to Jesus what happened that morning - some women of their group going to the tomb early morning, and finding it empty – angels telling them Jesus is alive – and, some of their friends going again and finding that empty tomb. But this Cleopas and his friend looked not convinced about this last development – that Jesus is alive!

Jesus listens to all these – and tries to explain all these things in the light of the scriptures... but they looked not understanding it or convinced of it.

They continued walking... and as it was evening... they urged Jesus strongly to stay with them – and then, the story changes. The guest they invited to their table - becomes their host. And we are very familiar to the language we hear from that table: 'at the table, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.' What happens next, we should not miss noticing. **Then** their eyes were opened, and they **recognized** Jesus.

The Eucharist is the sacrament of unity – and Christians are defined by taking part in the Eucharist. It represents the awesome price God paid for the redemption of God's creation. Eucharist is not extended to people belonging to other religious traditions. It is exclusively a Christian privilege. Baptism – confirmation – and then the Eucharist. This tradition goes back to the time of Apostolic Fathers. We read in *Didache*, 'You must not let anyone eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who are baptised in the Lord's name'. And Jesus says, 'do this in remembrance of me'. The liturgy not only takes us to a ritual feast and communion – but the invocation of the Spirit, thanksgiving to the Father and remembrance of the Son.

Justin Martyr, who lived in the second century writes that - nobody, is allowed to partake of 'the food we call Eucharist' except one who 'believes that the things we teach are true...' A strong warning for those

take part in the Eucharist comes from Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:29: ‘all who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves.’

But in today’s gospel Jesus shows the other dimension of the breaking of the bread. This first breaking of the bread that Jesus did hours after his resurrection was not with his eleven immediate disciples, but with Cleopas and his fellow traveller. And they are not receiving the broken bread ‘in remembrance’ of Jesus Christ – but the mystery is ‘revealed’ before their eyes ‘when they receive the broken bread’. In this encounter it was when Jesus **broke** the bread and **gave** it to them ‘their eyes were opened and they **recognized**’ him. Jesus was already present with them - yet Jesus fully disclosed himself only in the breaking of the bread. That means, it was in the Eucharistic movement that Jesus opened their eyes to recognize him – to these people, who through meditation and scripture, could not fully understand who Jesus was. The opening of the scripture was necessary – but it was not sufficient. The scripture could make only their hearts burn – but what opens their eyes - and makes them see - is the breaking of the bread.

So the question remains what would the resurrected Christ would do today? Whether Jesus would break the bread only to strengthen the faith of his disciples - or break the bread also to open the eyes of many who do not understand who he is. This has been a debate over centuries – about ‘open table’. Because it is Lord’s Table – it’s not priest’s table or church’s table – it is Lord’s Table.

And the ‘table’ is one of the most powerful places where community is built. And, meal is frequently an occasion during which families gather, where reunions are held, where great moments are celebrated, where friends are invited, and where community itself is shaped and formed.

Today’s gospel informs us that it is through Eucharist that the unique presence of Christ can be realized, for the Eucharist is Christ himself. In today’s story, it was not until they broke bread together that Jesus finally revealed himself to them. This could be expected, for ultimately, Eucharist is not so much that something that we do, but it is something that God does for us. May God strengthen us to receive this grace freely – and share that grace to all. Amen.