

## **4-6-08 Easter 3 Cycle A**

### **Homily by Father Larry Covington**

This great story today brings to mind the question: How do we recognize Christ? Let's look at this story more closely and try to find out. We begin with the two disciples on the road. They are discouraged and talking about what they had hoped for and how it had all come to nothing and so they were on their way from Jerusalem. Someone else joins them on the way asking them both about their conversation and so they share their discouragement. So, what changes them? There are three stages. The first is when a stranger joins them, a new presence, the unrecognized Jesus. A stranger to whom they have opened their hearts, indeed a newcomer they welcome. The second stage is a lesson in scripture, a double lesson really. To begin with, Jesus responds to their

disappointment pointing them back to the scripture. Don't they realize that the Messiah must suffer before entering into his glory? It is here that he interprets for them the whole of the Hebrew Testament and what it has to say about him. And in response they recall how their hearts were on fire as he spoke of these things but they do not recognize him.

The third stage is when Jesus takes bread, blesses it and breaks it, and gives it to them. a very familiar action. He did this when he multiplied the loaves for the thousands and at the last supper when he took the bread, blessed it and broke it giving it to them as his body. It was when he did this again that they recognized him. Jesus had transferred himself fully into the sacramental action that permitted those who walk with him to fully recognize his presence with them.

Now if you have not already noticed what we have here, this is the outline for the Mass. This entire episode is the very model for how we come to know Christ and we live it each time we gather to celebrate the Mass. The three stages in the disciple's experience foreshadow three stages where Christ is present to us in our Eucharistic liturgy, three ways that we can recognize him.

Now, let's go back to the first stage, the reality that transpires as soon as we gather together. In Matthew chapter 18 Jesus says: "wherever two or three are gathered in my name I will be in the midst of them." Two were walking down the road and before they knew it there was Jesus. To have the risen Christ in our midst we don't have to wait for the consecration. When we sing the gathering song, when we welcome each other so there are no strangers in the house of God, when we come together on

our way to what? We don't know. We just know that we are disappointed. We are disappointed in our world, disappointed in the people around us, disappointed in our best laid plans in ourselves, and yes even disappointed in God. And so here we are again in this building on Burnet Road side by side with people just like us. And we ask for each other's and God's forgiveness for the ways we have failed one another during the past week, and Christ's healing presence is coming up right along side of us.

The second stage begins as we settle back into the seat and open our ears to the story that is told. It is here that God is addressing me, Christ is speaking to me. Do I listen the way Moses listened to the Lord speak on Mount Sinai? Do I echo the young Samuel as he responds to God's voice saying "speak Lord, your servant is listening." Do I even listen the way the Samaritan woman, an enemy of the Jew,

listened to Jesus at Jacob's well? The word is spoken and that is the word of God. And here is Christ walking along side telling the story again to hearts hoping for something to hold on to.

The third stage is Christ's body and blood broken and poured out for us. When the same Christ rests on the palm of your hand, or on your tongue, enters your flesh and your spirit to transform you into his likeness, to instill into you a life beyond your ability to dream. Do we recognize him; recognize that here again is "God with us" God within us? So there it is, three ways to recognize Christ, prefigured in the two discouraged disciples walking to Emmaus and realized even more remarkably in the presence of bread. Christ is our coming together, Christ in our hearing, Christ in our table fellowship and in our flesh and before us and side us and behind us. But let's move on now to a wider

experience of Christ because we recognize Christ here in these things that we experience at Mass then it follows that we must recognize him where he has declared himself to be. I find that I am compelled to see the face of Christ everywhere I look. Whenever I find myself at the hospital I always try to stop by the neonatal care floor and see the newborns. One day as I looked down into the bassinet I saw the face of Bethlehem's child, with the un-mistakable countenance of Down's syndrome. Every weekday in the school playground I see the joyful faces of the youthful Christ at Nazareth and in these youngest children of ours. As I sit with them on the steps of the altar and we talk together about God their fresh minds aren't cluttered yet with the distortions which so often prevent us from seeing clearly and speaking truthfully. Art Linkletter used to say that

“Children say the darndest things” while that maybe true I have found that they also say some of the most profound and truthful things. When Jesus said “let the little children come unto me” I suspect it was because he thought they might have something important to say. At Christopher House, a local hospice, I stand alongside the bed of a young man dying of AIDS and I see the tortured eyes of Gethsemane’s Jesus and I hear him begging his father “Don’t let me die!” And driving down the drag at U.T. on a cold winter’s morning and you will have no trouble spotting a ragged and shivering imitation of humanity, in the naked crucified. When I look out on the face of this congregation I see the faces of Jesus from Bethlehem through Nazareth and Jerusalem to Calvary and beyond. There it is, what the Bible calls the image of God on the face of humanity. Pray God that we recognize it more and

more intensely as the days move on, that we see the face of Jesus as our face. This isn't fantasy; it is the biblical proclamation that God made us in his image and likeness, that sin marred this image almost beyond recognition, that the Son of God borrowed our flesh to reshape us in the likeness of Christ. Not some of us; every single one of us. and despite the pervasive presence of sin, despite the hatred and violence, despite all of the injustice that disfigures the face of humanity, there is simply no one who is totally severed from Christ, who ceases utterly to be in his image. My brothers and sisters: can you imagine what would happen to our tortured country if we Catholics could spy the face of Christ on all without exception whose paths we cross? All manner of walls would come tumbling down. And our hearts too would burn within us. for we would be struggling to realize the high-priestly prayer of Jesus, that

we “may all be one” as he and the Father are one, so that all men and women may know God’s love and may come to recognize and to love the Christ who died for them.