

Equilibrium in Prayer on the Road to Healing and Wholeness

A Retreat for those involved in Mental Health Pastoral Care

Wednesday

Talk 4 – The Journey continues

Introduction

Why did Jesus call the Church into being? The purpose is really quite simple. The Church exists to call people to faith, into relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. We live out this relationship, not simply as individual human beings, but in relationship with others.

Following his temptation in the wilderness, Jesus first act is to proclaim repentance and belief in the Good News.¹ To assist the accomplishment of this task, he calls his first disciples: Peter, Andrew, James and John.² He is explicit about their role – to be “fishers of men.”³

Their instant response to Jesus invitation speaks to us of the natural inclination of humanity towards God. So, the Church exists to call the world to Christ, in whom we find our fulfilment, our wholeness; in whom we are complete.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council reflected this in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* on the Church, in these words, quoting St. Cyprian:

“The Universal Church is seen to be a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁴

And again:

“The Church...receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God and she is, on earth, the seed and beginning of that kingdom.”⁵

We must not forget our task, then – of proclaiming and establishing that kingdom – a kingdom that finds its full flourishing in the glory of heaven, but which exists already here on earth, in the wonder of its beginnings. Our task is to bring the Love of Christ to the world – experienced through the life of the Church, especially in the Sacraments – and thereby calling people to Faith and enabling them to live in Hope. Love is the ground of all things. We saw this yesterday in our reflections on the love that exists in the relationship of prayer and, very specially, in the love that we see manifested on the Cross. We saw it in the service and faith of Martha and the listening contemplation of Mary.

St. Paul recognises that “there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.”⁶

In our ministry, then, we are fulfilling the task given by Christ to the Church. We call people to the fullness of life in Christ; we call them faith through love; we bring hope where, in many cases, hope

¹ Mt. 4:17

² Mt. 4:18-22.

³ Mt. 4:19.

⁴ LG. 4.

⁵ LG. 5.

⁶ 1 Cor 13:13.

has been obscured or even lost. This is indeed calling people to wholeness, to completeness, to that place of contentment and peace that we find in the person of Jesus Christ. This does not mean freeing people from difficulty – the Cross is there for each of us – but it does mean that we are called to enable them to find strength in Christ that will enable them, in the words of yesterday evening's *Lectio* to turn difficulties to profit.⁷

We are called, in the final analysis, to enable people to encounter the Risen Christ, who brings light to our darkness, hope where there is despair, life where death once reigned. He is our Hope. It is in a Christ who is Risen that we have faith. It is the Risen Christ who transforms our Love.

Transformation in the Risen Christ

It is, perhaps, difficult for us to place ourselves in the shoes of the Apostles and Disciples as they would have been after the Crucifixion. We know what happens next! They did not know what was to come on the Third day. We do know that Judas, having realised that he had betrayed his Lord and knowing him to be condemned, fell into such a despair that he hanged himself,⁸ but we can only imagine the sense of loss experienced by the disciples following the Lord's death on the Cross.

We might remember that Jesus had, on the Mount of Transfiguration, shown himself in glory to Peter, James and John – but we also know from the Gospel that they did not really understand what they had seen until after the Resurrection.⁹

So, on that first Good Friday afternoon, there must have been so many questions in their minds and hearts. What is the point of continuing? What purpose the last three years? Why did he have to die? What do we do now? We have given up everything - where has it got us? Will the Chief Priests come for us next? The sense of despondency of great indeed.

We find this expressed by the disciples on the road to Emmaus: "They were talking together about all that had happened," Perhaps they just wanted to get out of the house and, by going for a walk and a chat, find a way of getting through their grief. "When questioned by the Lord, whom they did not recognise: "They stopped short, their faces downcast."¹⁰

Their despondency becomes clearer as Jesus speaks to them:

"You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these past few days...Our own hope had been that he was would be the one to set Israel free."¹¹

This is a very telling statement and indicates that they still not understood what Jesus was about. It reminds us of the difficulties that arose for those disciples who saw Jesus as an earthly leader who would free them from the yolk of Roman occupation.

Their description of the events of Easter Day – the very morning of the walk to Emmaus – is very telling:

⁷ GUILLERAND, A., *They Speak by Silences*, London, Darton Longman & Todd, 1975, p.68.

⁸ Mt. 27:5.

⁹ Lk. 9:28-36.

¹⁰ Lk. 24: 14, 17.

¹¹ Lk. 24:18, 21.

“Some women from the group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning and when they did not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.”¹²

As I read this, I see a process of increasing disappointment. Did the women simply come up with a fanciful story about a few angels, perhaps coming from their grief? Perhaps the body had been stolen and they couldn't face it? But no, Peter and John went to see and agreed with them women – but still, after all this, no sign of either a body or a living Jesus. It is as if they are saying ‘So much for all of that then!’

What happens next is, perhaps, rather astounding. Jesus tells them off for their slowness in faith and then takes them through the prophets, pointing to all the prophecies about the coming Messiah. One might think that after all of that, they might have worked it all out! Still, no. This is surely an indication of the depth of their grief. The Cross had been truly scandalous, in every sense. Such unutterable suffering – and all for nothing. These two disciples had each other – and there is a tradition that says that the un-named disciple was Mary, the wife of Clopas who had stood at the foot of the Cross – but everything was over in terms of the promises of the Messiah.

They had been on a wonderful journey for the last few years. They had witnessed miracles of healing, devils had been cast out, Lazarus had been raised from the dead. They had heard great preaching and had a real hope in the promise of new things to come. They had listened to the Word of Life. Now – it had all come to absolutely nothing.

Why did they ask Jesus to stay with them? We know that they were going to a particular village – which must have been within the distance permitted for travel on the Sabbath. They would not have wished for their companion to break the Sabbath, hence their invitation for him to stay.

Then comes the breaking of bread and recognition – the effect on these disciples is overwhelming. “Their eyes were opened and they recognised him.”¹³ All thought of Sabbath regulation goes out of the window. This, in itself is significant. It is a sign of the new Kingdom that Jesus brings – the old order has gone, the new order is here. There is nothing now to keep them at Emmaus – they can, and must, get back to the Upper Room. The imperative is to share the Good News that Jesus is risen – and we can feel the excitement of those gathered in Jerusalem:

“Yes, it is true. The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.”¹⁴

The account of the journey to Emmaus begins with the despondency that follows death and the lack of purpose, the desire just to get away from everything and find a way to move on. This is transformed by an encounter – but an encounter at many levels.

There is a call to understanding here – seen in Jesus going through the prophets with them. Their minds are made ready for what is yet to come – the encounter at the Breaking of Bread. It is this that opens their eyes. This is significant. The eye was seen as the “lamp of the body” – it was seen as the entry-point of light for the person. To say that “their eyes were opened” is to say that they were illumined, that they understood at every level of their being. Things have moved from head to heart, from the outside to the very core where the Encounter with the Lord takes place.

¹² Lk. 24:23-24.

¹³ Lk. 24:31.

¹⁴ Lk. 24:34.

Once that encounter of love takes place, there can be only one result – overwhelming joy, courage, sharing, proclamation and a new way of life; the old gives way to the new.

Is Emmaus for us?

We must remember that Emmaus – like every passage of Scripture – is, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a reality for us too. We too have our Emmaus moments.

We shall have had those moments when Psalm 87 is true for us, when “our one companion is darkness.”¹⁵ We shall have had – or will have – those moments when our experience of the Cross goes no further than suffering and death. Such times of darkness need to be dispelled by the light of the Risen Christ.¹⁶ As the Pascal Candle pierces the darkened Church on Easter Night, so the light that is the love of the Risen Lord burns away the darkness of our night.

Sometimes, it seems to me, when things are especially dark, we can walk along the road in silence, unable to listen to the One who walks alongside. Perhaps that silence can last for quite a few miles. It may take a very long time before we are able to listen to him open our minds and hearts to the message of life - but our companion never leaves us, for the very reason that he continued on the road to the point of death.

It is in the encounter that our brokenness is restored. We must be conscious that it is the **breaking** of bread that wholeness and healing is brought about. Jesus brokenness on the Cross brings healing. Jesus brokenness on the Cross leads to Resurrection. The Candle must be burnt away if it is to give light.

This, in turn, is a model for our service. For we are the instruments of the Risen Christ in the world of today. He calls us to walk on the road with those who are in darkness, to walk in patience, to go the distance, to gently open minds and hearts to the light and love that he offers to us. We are called to give of ourselves – to allow ourselves to be burnt away a little bit, to be broken a little bit – that others may find hope in Him. Returning to a text of yesterday, “we are only the earthenware jars that hold the treasure.”

Thus, surely, is what we are about as Church. Pope Francis calls for a transparent, simple, proclamation of the Word. The ministry to which we have been called is very much at the heart of the Church, for our task is to bring the Good News into what are often dark places, our task is to take that walk to Emmaus with people who are downcast and overburdened and to call them to relationship with Christ – for it is in Christ that we truly find wholeness and health.

¹⁵ Ps. 87, v.18.

¹⁶ HUME, B., The Mystery of Love, London, Darton Longman & Todd, 2000, p.54.