

# Sunday Homily

## 3rd SUNDAY OF EASTER

26 APRIL 2020

YEAR A

“He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them.  
Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised him.”

Luke 24:30-31

### Illustration

At the time of the First World War, the principal morning service in most Anglican churches in England was Matins. This proved to be a problem for chaplains in the trenches who were trying to bring the presence of God into those mud-filled, blood-filled holes in the ground. It was a problem because many of the young men in uniform were unchurched. The glories of the *Te Deum* led by a parish choir, however humble, had not become a window onto the numinous for these boys. But more fundamentally, with the exception of the Psalms, Matins didn't speak to the soldiers' ghastly situation, where suffering and death were all around, fear and despair endemic.

What did speak to them was Holy Communion. The men didn't need to be familiar with the liturgy, for they soon came to recognise God in a body broken for them and blood poured out for them. Communion brought them the comfort of God's real presence and hope for life even there where death seemed to rule.

### Gospel Teaching

As Cleopas and friend walked to Emmaus in the company of a stranger, they were certainly not in a situation comparable to that of soldiers in trench warfare. Or were they? Perhaps it would be wrong to underestimate the despair of those two disciples. Their country was occupied by enemy soldiers, who crushed any opposition ruthlessly. Mass crucifixions were common. And then a man called Jesus had brought them hope of liberation. Cleopas refers to him as “a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people”. And when he adds that “we had hoped that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel”, you can feel the disappointment weighing on him like a million shrouds. He and his friend weren't just mourning the death of a friend, which would be bad enough, but the death of the dearest hope of a whole nation.

Although the stranger walking with them was, in fact, the Jesus whom they mourned, they didn't recognise him. He gave what must have been the most accomplished exposition of scripture, proving that the Messiah was meant to “suffer these things and then enter into his glory”, but still they didn't recognise

him. It was only when they invited Jesus to stay with them, and he sat at table with them and broke the bread, that the veil was lifted and they knew that Jesus was Lord and he had risen indeed.

## Application

What about us? We aren't fighting in trenches nor do we live under an occupying power. Or do we? Isn't that a perfect description of sin? An occupying power? And are we immune to doubt and despair? Clearly not. We walk the road to Emmaus on many a day of misgivings, when more bad news on the world's scene makes us question if God's in his heaven, when reading our scriptures brings God no closer and our prayers ring hollow.

Sometimes our hearts are filled with the kind of complaints that concerned the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Like them, we are tempted to tell each other all the terrible things that have been happening to us in the last few days – in our case, perhaps, domestic quarrels, troubles at work, the loneliness of life – and all these things so fill our minds that we fail once again to recognise Jesus.

This is why Holy Communion is such a miracle of grace. Holy Communion has the power to lift us off the wearying Emmaus road, to still the questioning, to place our troubles at the foot of the cross, as we hold out our hands for the bread of heaven and the wine of the new covenant.

So yes, we can lose sight of Jesus in our questioning, in our biblical interpretation and even in our pastoral work – after all, even unbelieving social workers or biblical scholars engage in these activities.

But gather round the Lord's table for bread and wine and there is the defining moment of our discipleship. We know Jesus lives, not because a scholar has told us, not because of rumours of resurrection appearances, not because of all the work we've done in his name, but because, quite simply, we meet him where he's always been, in the broken bread and shared wine.

In the trenches of our fear and despair, nailing our occupying forces to the cross, he is recognised – if only for a fleeting moment. But it's a moment that can sustain us through the coming week.