

Reflection for the Third Sunday of Easter

Today's gospel speaks of shattered hopes and expectations. Two otherwise unknown disciples of Jesus, Cleopas and one who is not named at all, share the hesitancy and slowness of Thomas, Peter and Mary Magdalene in respect to believing that Jesus was truly risen from the dead which I spoke about last weekend. Even though they have heard about the empty tomb and the claim of "*some women of our company*" that "*they had even seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive*" they have decided not to stay in Jerusalem to see what might happen next but have left downcast and disappointed. When Jesus catches up with them on the road and enquires "*what is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?*" they are described as "*looking sad.*" They describe "*Jesus of Nazareth*" not as the Son of God or as the Messiah but only as "*a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people.*" And they described the plot of the Jewish "*chief priests and rulers*" to deliver "*him up to be condemned to death, and crucified.*" Then they go on to speak of their hopes and expectations in the past tense, as if over and done with. "*We had hoped*" they said "*that he was the one to redeem Israel*" but the implication is that this has come to nothing, their hopes and expectations shattered whatever the claims of the women. When Jesus came alongside them, we are told that "*their eyes were kept from recognising him*" but we are not told why. Perhaps thinking that Jesus could be risen from the dead was a step too far, something that they couldn't admit or accept?

Cleopas and his companion speak of "*Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a mighty prophet.*" As Jesus speaks with them he laments their failure to have grasped all that he has taught them and identifies himself as "*the Christ*", the Messiah spoken of by "*Moses and all the Prophets*" and he "*interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.*" Even then they do not come to faith that Jesus has risen from the dead and it is not until later when they have sat down at table together and "*he took the bread, and blessed and broke it, and gave it to them*" that "*their eyes were opened and they recognised him.*"

Cleopas and his companion are not simply on a physical journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus but they are also on a faith journey. Slowly but eventually, they came to believe that Jesus was truly risen. And so, we should not be surprised if we, or those dear to us, struggle with faith. Like these two disciples of the gospel our eyes can be kept from recognising him. Faith is not something that can be attained by a scientific analysis or deduced through logic. It is only found in a living encounter with the risen Jesus such as these two disciples experienced when Jesus was "*at table with them*" and "*he was known to them at the breaking of bread.*" For a true and lively faith in the risen Jesus we need to let him into a personal relationship with us, to allow him to sit with us at our tables and in our lives so that he might break bread with us.