

Sunday April 18th, 2021

## Third Sunday of Easter Parishioner Reflection

By: Jonathan Tucker

Today's gospel - Luke 24:35-48 - begins as two "converts" give *their* testimony to *the eleven and those who were with them...* most of whom remained convinced that Jesus was dead. Cleopas<sup>1</sup> and an unnamed disciple had made a special trip back to Jerusalem to testify to an extraordinary encounter earlier that day with Jesus. According to them, He *spoke* with them. He *explained* the scriptures to them. It wasn't until dinner that they actually recognized Him. According to them their hearts had *burned within them*. (For those present this phrase may have called to mind their own experience of Jesus when He was alive.) That was *their* testimony! They were witnesses to a resurrected Jesus.

*The others*, as they are referred to, remained unconvinced. Unbelievers. Ironic. These were His own family, friends and followers. But many of them there that day had seen Jesus crucified. They had watched as his lifeless body was lowered from a cross and the corpse placed in a tomb less than 48 hours earlier. The evidence was undeniable; He was dead! Only an encounter with Jesus Himself could change their minds; convert their thinking to see beyond the temporal.

As Cleopas and his friend were testifying, Jesus *stood in their midst*, the gospel reports. Unlike previous encounters earlier in the day, in which Jesus appeared incognito, there was no mistaking Jesus now. Reactions bear witness to that; fear, surprise, disbelief and astonishment.

In response, Jesus asks of them; *Why are you troubled? Why do questions arise in your hearts?* "Because you're supposed to be dead!", would have been my reply. Or, "Why do you *think* we're troubled, Lord? What kind of question is that? We heard you cry out, *My God, why have you abandoned me?* If God abandoned *You*, what hope is there for us?", I might have blurted out.

It's through these questions that Jesus meets them; In their fear, doubt and disbelief. His questions cut to the core then *and now*; posed against the backdrop of death's defeat by the one who stood before them. *Why are you troubled? What is at the root of your heart's questions?* His questions prompt reflection and examination for them. For us. His questions are so obvious, aren't they? Implied by His questions; I told you how events were to unfold.

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic and Orthodox traditions believe Cleopas was the brother of St. Joseph.

Then God's tenderness and mercy continues for all present to see as Jesus invites them to *touch me*. God incarnate - the author of life, as Peter describes in today's first reading - invites His creation to *touch me*. Wow! I could understand if God had chosen to walk away from His creation after such abuse and maltreatment once and for all. But God's love and desire for reconciliation with humanity is so great He risks Himself again. Unbelievable had it not actually occurred as set out in the gospel accounts.

So much more could be written about this encounter with Jesus. I have enjoyed today's gospel so much! It has touched me deeply. I have felt as though Jesus himself has invited me through this passage to *touch* Him. His questions to His frightened and confused followers prompt me to face my own fears and doubt in light of the Resurrection; *Why are you troubled? Why do questions arise in your heart?* And the calm in His voice as He said, *See My hands and My feet, that it is Me* offers calm and peace today as it did to those who met Jesus again. And, yes, I understand what could make Cleopas and his friend exclaim *did not our hearts burn within us*. Once again they had been profoundly changed by their encounter with Jesus. That has been my experience of Jesus for the past forty-three years of my life in spite of fears, doubts and distractions along the way. That's *my* testimony of Him.

The outcome of a trial can turn on the testimony of a witness. Without having personal knowledge of an event, there is no testimony. To be a credible and effective witness one must have seen an event take place or had an experience; in other words been present or possess personal knowledge. Today's Gospel reading begins with witnesses testifying. And it ends with this reminder; *you are witnesses of these things*. Do you have a recent testimony of Him to share?