

Easter III
 April 6, 2008
 Lk 24.13-35
 Fr. M. Dow Sanderson

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Like most children born in the “buckle” of the Bible belt, I learned a fair amount of scripture at a young age. I can still remember my very first King James Bible given to me when I was learning to read. Like all children’s Bibles, it was filled with pictures to fuel a child’s imagination. Eventually the cover came off, and on the few blank “divider” pages, I had colored my own pictures to augment the ones provided by the publisher. It was at that early stage that my parents became convinced that I did not have a future in art!

But we did learn the stories. And at Vacation Bible School, we practiced our “sword drills” so that we could look up passages quickly. There were little songs we sang to help memorize the Books of the New Testament in order. Knowing scripture was important in the very pious Protestant world, and I remember years later in seminary, being amazed that adults my age who had grown up in the Episcopal Church had not nearly the same immersion in scripture.

But for all the familiarity with the stories, there was, I would later discover, a lack of context... a sort of disconnect. And it was the very Gospel that we have heard today that opened my eyes...

It was my first Holy Week here as a college student. I had sung “Fling Wide the Gates” in Mr. Koester’s Palm Sunday Cantata. I had participated in the Holy Week liturgies. But, of course, my parents expected me to come home for the Weekend. I somehow convinced my father to go with me to a sort of “abbreviated” Easter Vigil at Church of the Resurrection in Surfside Beach, but then it was off with the family to the Presbyterian Church on Easter Sunday morning. I am sure the music was good. I know that Mr. Sartelle’s sermon would have been first-rate. But I remember that the lack of eucharist on Easter Sunday left me with a gnawing and aching feeling... partly from a real spiritual hunger... partly from a sort of rigorous spiritual “Pharisee-ism” peculiar to 18 year old Anglo-Catholic boys.

But in any event, on my drive back to Charleston, I can remember being agitated at having missed Easter Communion. By the time I arrived back in town, all the Episcopal Churches were locked tight. But in those days, St. Mary’s Church on Hasell Street had a Sunday, 6:00 pm mass. And so that’s where I went.

And the Gospel for Easter Evening was exactly the one that we just heard. Now I had certainly read Luke’s Gospel. I knew about the Road to Emmaus Story (the typical Protestant notion is that it about a Bible Study and a pot luck supper!) ... But I had never heard it read at the Eucharist, in the evening, and on Easter. It was like lightning bolts went off in my head!

Two disciples, one named Cleopas, were walking on a road. It is noteworthy that they were walking away from Jerusalem. The Lord had Risen, but they were walking FROM the Good News. And so the Lord pursued them, as he always seeks the lost.

But they did not recognize him because they were so consumed by their own prejudice that their eyes could not believe what was before them.

And so Jesus preached... beginning with Moses and all the prophets... I would wager it was a good sermon. It was clearly a long sermon! But still they didn’t know him.

Only when they reached the house... and he went in with them. And at Supper, he held bread in his holy hands,

and he extended his arm in blessing... And he gave thanks over the bread.

What image flashed through their minds? Was it a memory of the Last Supper, from just the Thursday before?

...When he extended his arm in blessing and his robe slipped back, did they see the wound in his wrist?

Perhaps it was both of these things. But there, in the breaking of the bread... at mass... in the eucharist... they knew him. And only then... did the words he had preached find their fulfillment. Did not our hearts burn as he spoke to us...?

My astonishment on that Easter Sunday was to find in scripture such a beautiful vindication, not only of our Lord's Real Presence in the eucharist, but of the necessity of the Catholic balance of Word and Sacrament.

Even the preaching of Jesus himself was somehow "unfinished work" if not placed within the heart of worship... the giving of Himself in the Blessed Sacrament.

We all, from time to time, find ourselves on the Road to Emmaus... walking swiftly away from our disappointments. Our only agenda is to get home before dark. We may not even realize that we are walking away from Good News. But the Lord pursues us. He becomes our companion and fellow-traveler. He comes in to sup with us. And He is known to us... in the Breaking of the Bread.

This morning, we are grateful that Katelyn McRae Siino is also to be brought into this Holy Fellowship. And with her parents and godparents, we too will renew our promise to continue in the Apostles teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of the Bread, and in the Prayers. May God give us each the Grace to ever more seek him... who so diligently seeks us.

Amen+++