

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Apr 24th 2014

The gospel readings during the week after Easter unpack the tremendous event of Jesus' resurrection particularly from the perspective of how the disciples experienced that event. What must it have been like for the disciples to encounter Jesus after his cruel death on the cross?

Today's reading follows immediately after the encounter with Jesus by the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. Once recognized as the Lord, the two immediately returned to Jerusalem to share their good news: "they recognized him in the breaking of the bread." Jesus came to them in their sorrow and walked along the road with them. While they were sharing their incredible story Jesus appears to the whole group: "Peace be with you."

Jesus is with them and eager to meet them as they are; the two on the road away from Jerusalem in all their grief, sadness and anger over Jesus' death don't immediately recognize him. He simply walks with them and opens the scripture to them. The disciples huddled together out of fear for their lives are "startled and terrified," and they think they are seeing a "ghost." Clearly they are befuddled by Jesus untimely death. How does Jesus encounter us?

Jesus encounters us and we him in the ordinary events of our lives. As Jesus approaches us as we are with our ups and downs our grace and sin, we are changed by the encounter. To encounter someone implies a relationship with that person that is special in its depth. How well the disciples knew Jesus, but now he is coming to them at an even deeper level of intimacy.

To encounter someone is a more profound experience than simply being physically next to her/him. I may be at an airport physically present to hundreds of people, but that is not an encounter. I recall an airport scene that took place close enough for me to observe. There was a group that I sized up as a family gathered around a uniformed soldier. The interactions among them spoke of love and concern. I reckoned that the family was sending their son, brother, grandson on a possibly dangerous mission for the young man as a soldier.

Our encounter with Jesus is like that story: filled with deep emotions and love given and received. We are in a love relationship with Jesus. Thus encounters with him are suffused with care, concern, forgiveness and love beyond measure.

We encounter him in others, those who love us and we them. We encounter him in the community of faith that gathers to celebrate the Eucharist and the other sacraments like baptism and the anointing of the sick.

To celebrate Easter is to be attentive to the many ways that Jesus encounters us, in the poor, the sick, the needy, those who treat us with care and invite us to deeper love in all the events of our human life.

Lord, be with me as I attend to the many ways that you seek to encounter me in my life. Keep me close to you so that I may grow in the love you shower so abundantly. And help me to respond like the disciples by sharing those encounters with sisters and brothers of the human family.

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