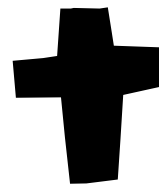




# Bringing Home the Word



3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY OF EASTER May 8, 2011

## Telling Stories and Breaking Bread

By Diane M. Houdek

We tend to jump ahead to the ending of the stories like the one in today's Gospel. We know that the stranger on the road is Jesus. We know that the two disciples won't recognize him until the very end. We feel a bit superior, like we're in on a joke from the beginning.

Church folks like to take the story even a step beyond that and talk about how it's an early representation of the Eucharist. Jesus breaks open the word for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He explains the Hebrew Scriptures to them and show how they foreshadow his death and resurrection. They recognize their Lord in the breaking of the bread. We can compare it to our celebration of Mass, where we hear

the word of God proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word and the bread and wine are consecrated and we have Christ's real presence in the Body and the Blood.

But we can also take our time with this story and hear it as though for the first time. One of the more profound things about the Catholic lectionary cycle is the way we hear the same stories year after year, season by season, Sunday after Sunday. And because it's the living word of God, our understanding of it grows and changes as our faith deepens and our lives take different twists and turns. If we listen attentively, we will hear things we've never heard before.

Take these two disciples traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They've just lived through a horrendous tragedy. A man they have been following for as long as three years has just been accused of blasphemy by the leading religious and civil authorities and publicly and shamefully executed as a criminal. Suddenly everything they've believed in has been called into question. And if they were close to Jesus and his inner circle, they've also lost a close friend to death and are caught in a personal and intimate grief that's still very new, very raw.

While Luke tells us that Jesus explained the Scriptures to them, I'm imagining that it wasn't an academic

presentation, laying out the facts and the words of Scripture like so many documents in a court case. The best spiritual directors bring people along gradually, opening their minds but even more their hearts to the truth within. This is more than ever true when people are going through especially rocky periods in their lives, whether it's a marriage on the rocks, the loss of a loved one, or disillusionment with long-held beliefs.

Most of us have had an experience in which talking things over with a friend or sometimes a stranger can give us a new perspective on things and we see things in a different light. We see things we had missed before. The simple act of listening can reveal to us something that we didn't know we knew.

In the case of the disciples on the road to Emmaus, the discussion is condensed into a day's walk along dusty roads, followed by a meal at an inn. But the wonder of our God is that we can talk things over for as long as it takes for our eyes to be opened, for our hearts to recognize the truth that burns within us. And, like the disciples, we have the grace of the Real Presence, the sign of the Body and Blood of Christ in the bread and wine at Mass.

If we're faithful to the inner workings of our both our human and our spiritual lives, we will come to know the Lord in our midst. ✝

### SUNDAY READINGS

#### **Acts 2:14, 22-33**

Peter preaches about the Risen Lord. God's plan of salvation reaches out to the world.

#### **1 Peter 1:17-21**

We are urged to conduct ourselves with reverence before God the Father, who offers us salvation.

#### **Lk 24:13-35**

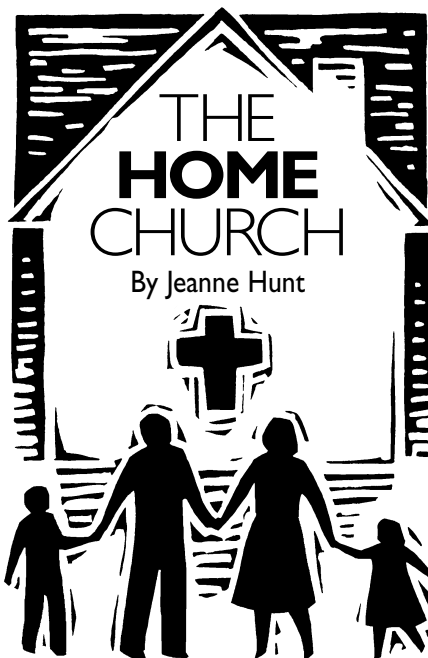
The Risen Lord accompanies two of his disciples on the road. They recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

REFLECTION  
QUESTIONS  
QUESTIONS  
REFLECTION

- What are the two disciples talking about on the road?
- Why did Jesus talk about the Scriptures rather than tell them who he was?
- What happened that caused the disciples to recognize Jesus??
- Who has been Christ to you?
- Describe your walk with Jesus right now.

PRAYER

O Lord,  
surprise me  
with your presence.  
Fill my heart and my eyes  
with a new grace  
of recognition,  
so that when you come  
I will know you.  
During these Easter days  
I thank you  
for staying among us.  
Alleluia and Amen.



Have you ever been in a busy airport in a distant city and recognized someone from home? It's disorienting at first. The two disciples from Emmaus must have felt that way when they realized that the stranger on the road was Jesus. People traveling are often in a mental fog. Everything seems unfamiliar. They just want to get where they are going.

When Archbishop Timothy Dolan of New York spoke at his investiture, he commented that the streets of New York are like the road to Emmaus. They are filled with people who are meant to be Christ to us. In order to recognize this, we need to see people with the eyes of faith.

Each of us walks the road to our own Emmaus. We need to allow Jesus to surprise us with his presence. Perhaps the road leads to your own kitchen, where your teenage son tells you a story that touches your heart. Or while you're at the grocery store, a friend stops you and listens to your concerns and worries. In the evening you and your spouse sit on the porch, hold hands and watch the sunset. There are no words—just the two of you and Jesus delighting in the Creator's work. Wherever the road takes us, Jesus is waiting to surprise us along the way.



In today's Gospel, Luke tells us that the two disciples on the way to Emmaus recognize Jesus in his act of breaking the bread at the evening meal. Surely it reminded them of the powerful moment at the Last Supper when Jesus gave them the gift of himself in the bread and the wine.

In the eucharistic liturgy, the priest raises the Body of Christ and breaks it in a very deliberate action known as the fraction rite. This calls to mind the Emmaus moment of recognizing the presence of Christ.

This liturgical breaking of the consecrated host at Mass is a symbol that through the Body of Christ the faithful become one with him and with one another. The images of breaking and uniting are woven throughout the prayers of the Church and the writings of saints and theologians through the centuries.

The second-century document known as the *Didache* uses this image: "As grain once scattered on the hillside is in the broken bread made one, so from all lands your Church is gathered into your kingdom by your Son."

In the breaking of the bread the faithful commit themselves to share in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We become bread and communion for our troubled and broken world.

WEEKDAY  
READINGS

Monday	Acts 6:8-15; Jn 6:22-29	Thursday	Acts 8:26-40; Jn 6:44-51
Tuesday	Acts 7:51-8:1a; Jn 6:30-35	Friday	Acts 9:1-20; Jn 6:52-59
Wednesday	Acts 8:1b-8; Jn 6:35-40	Saturday	Acts 1:15-17, 20-26/Jn 15:9-17 <i>Matthias</i>