

022 Third Sunday of Easter (A)

The other disciple

In today's Gospel we hear of the appearance of the risen Christ to two disciples on the road to Emmaus. The risen Christ comes up to them and walks with them for some hours, but they don't recognise him. It is only later in the day, at the breaking of the bread, that they realise who he is.

It's interesting that Luke names only one of the two disciples walking to Emmaus – a man called Cleopas. But who was the other disciple? Luke gives us no information about this person. This is a little strange. In journalism we were taught that the key elements in any story are – who, what, why, when and where. Well, something of the 'who' is missing here. Did Luke just forget to give the person's name?

For many centuries it was assumed that this disciple was also male. But in the past 50 years, people have speculated that maybe the second disciple was a woman. Perhaps they were a husband and wife.

Some people think there is a clue to the second disciple's identity in the crucifixion scene in John's Gospel. There we read that among the women beside the cross was 'Mary, the wife of Clopas', a name is very similar Cleopas, the name of the disciple on the road to Emmaus. So, some speculate that the two disciples on the road to Emmaus were Cleopas and his wife Mary. Maybe – but Clopas and Cleopas are two distinct names, so this remains just a theory.

Well, preparing for this Mass I decided to solve the problem of the identity of the second disciple. I looked up many biblical websites, and some rather large biblical commentaries that we have in our library. I studied everything – and I'm pleased to report that I found the answer. In a 'world first', I can tell you who is the second disciple on the road to Emmaus. This disciple is YOU.

I'm not trying to be funny. The second disciple on the road to Emmaus is you, and it is me. Each one of us is this disciple. It is our point of entry into the story, the place where this story becomes our story. And that is very important. With every Gospel story we need to find the place where it becomes our story, perhaps identifying with a person in the story, or with the situation, or whatever.

The journey of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus is our journey also; a journey that is often walked in darkness and confusion but a journey in which the risen Christ is always with us, though we often fail to recognise him.

Very important on our Emmaus journey are the companions who have walked with us along the Way – firstly, the companions we can name, like Cleopas. We can think, with gratitude, of the many Cleopases in our life – family members, CCC members and other friends who have been our companions on the way.

And we can also think about the strangers who have entered our lives, perhaps ever so briefly, whose names we never learnt or perhaps have forgotten, who, in the brief time they journeyed with us, made our hearts burn within us.

Today, let us give thanks for the risen Christ and all who have been our companions on our journey to Emmaus and back to Jerusalem.

Fr Michael Goonan SSP