

As we listen to the Scripture readings in the days after Easter, there are a couple of things that we might notice. The first is that very often when Jesus appears, people don't recognise him. This happened to Mary Magdalene on Easter Sunday when she thought she was speaking to the gardener, but it was Jesus. She only recognised him when he called her by name. There is a second thing that we can notice in the readings in the days after Easter, and it is that these appearances are to a small number of people. Most people don't have that sort of encounter with the risen Jesus. You may remember last Sunday, after Jesus had revealed himself to Thomas, he said to Thomas, "You believe because you have seen me, but happy are those who have not seen me and who believe". Of course, that is also a reference to everyone who comes after the generation of those who lived with Jesus and who saw him after the resurrection.

In today's gospel where we meet the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we have another instance of disciples not recognising him. And when they do recognise him, we learn a bit more about how later generations will believe. The moment of recognition comes at the breaking of the bread. Let's recall that at that moment they immediately remembered their experience with this stranger as they walked with him on the road. As he talked with them their hearts were burning within them. That conversation had been no ordinary conversation. Rather they were listening to the words of Jesus; they were listening to the Word of God. This word was transforming them and healing them. This word helped them to make sense of what they had been experiencing. This word prepared them to recognise the risen Lord in the breaking of bread. At that moment when he broke the bread, we are told that he vanished from their sight. Yet, this didn't seem to disturb them or make them sad. It was as though he was still with them. They were clearly filled with joy.

This scene of listening to the Word of God and recognising him in the breaking of bread is a pattern we are all familiar with. It is what we do each time we celebrate Mass. This is the way that all the generations since the first Christian generation, have encountered the risen Lord. We might extend this and say that the encounter happens as we celebrate any of the sacraments.

The gospel invites us to reflect a bit more deeply on the experience of those two disciples on the road and what insights it might give us about our own encounter with the risen Lord. One of the most important things to notice is what they talked about. They were feeling downcast

about what had just happened all around them and its impact on them. That's what they talked about. The way the conversation began, it is clear that this was the conversation that the stranger wanted to have. He didn't want just idle chatter; he wanted them to talk about what was bothering them at that moment. This is what opened the way for him to go to the Scriptures. The stranger used the Scriptures to help them make sense of their experience and to feel consoled. This was transformative for them. We know this because they said that their hearts were burning within them.

I think there is a lesson here for us. We listen to the Scriptures each week at Mass and at other times when we read them in prayer. The scene in today's gospel tells us that an important way of reading the Scriptures is to be aware of our situation at that moment. We might be joyful or we might be sad; we might be anxious or we might be feeling confident; we might have an important decision to make, or we might have just made an important decision. If we are aware of our situation, then we can listen to the word of God with ears ready to hear what God might be saying to us right now. The further lesson from the disciples on the road is that when our hearts are burning because we have heard God speaking, we will joyfully recognise him and welcome him as we celebrate the Eucharist. We will recognise that he is with us to save us.

There is one other thing in the gospel that we haven't yet noticed. It is what happened afterwards. Very quickly, even though it was evening, the two disciples rush back to Jerusalem to tell the other disciples about their experience. From this we can learn that the encounter with the risen Lord, even though it is personal, is not simply for the individual. It is also for the sake of others. What that might look like will vary from person to person and situation to situation. It doesn't necessarily mean that we will shout it from the rooftops. But it may mean that we will deal with others in a new way because of where the Lord has guided us. Or it might mean that we recognise someone who we sense might want to hear about God, and we invite them to take a step towards God. It will no doubt always mean that we want to shape our life so that our choices will show forth the kingdom of God.

I think that is what the risen Lord meant when he said to Thomas, "Happy are those who have not seen yet believe".