

The Paper Pulpit

(Reflections from the Pastor)

3rd Sunday in Easter

Last week at Mass I invited all men in the parish to become a member of the parish men's group under the umbrella of the Knights of Columbus. Please return the sheet to me, call or email me your interest this week if you haven't already done so. I also gave out a sheet inviting you to become involved in the parish. Please get me that information as well. You can notify me by email, as this works the best - frjim@stmaxkolbe.org.

There is a story of a fellow who played basketball in high school. He made all-conference several times. He was good. He wasn't recruited or given a scholarship, but he was a good basketball player. He went to the major basketball playing university in his state. This was back in the day when they all had freshman teams. He tried out and made the team. He played quite a bit on that freshman team. He continued to work on his game over the summer, spending almost every day in the gym as he had since he was 12. About six weeks into his sophomore year he went to the college gym for the announced try-outs for the varsity team. He knew that most of the spots were taken by the scholarship players, he knew there were only two places for walk-ons, he knew there were a lot of people trying out. But he thought he could make it; he made the freshman team without a scholarship, surely the coaches had recognized his talent. He told himself they had not offered him a scholarship because they knew he had an academic award. And 30 minutes into the try-out, an assistant coach came over, patted him on the shoulder and said, "Thank you for trying out," and pointed him to the door. He found himself standing outside, sitting on the steps with the other rejects, dazed and confused and disappointed and wondering to himself, "What do I do now?" Like the two men on the road to Emmaus, my friend had had his high hopes dashed and was left to wonder not only what might have been, but also where do I go from here.

Our Gospel today leads us to consider a basic question. Where do we turn when things fall apart? Fall apart not only for us personally, but also for the world. What do we do when the things we have trusted in, believed in, hoped in, seem to have failed us?

The men on the road to Emmaus are disheartened by the death of Jesus. In Luke's gospel they say, "*but we had hoped that he was the one who would redeem Israel.*" What's interesting is that they say this in the midst of a recital of the basic facts about Jesus. They knew the story – they just had no idea what it really meant. Jesus uses the Hebrew Scriptures to explain their experiences to them. The facts were not enough, the Word of God gave meaning to the experiences they had had with Jesus. Though the men had begun to understand the connection between the crucified Jesus and the Risen Christ, they still did not make the connection between the Risen Christ and the person in their midst. Talking, speaking, reading, words alone did not make that happen. That was something that had to be experienced, and all mystical experiences are in some ways beyond words. Somehow, when Jesus played host at the meal in their home, the universe shifted. "*When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.*" (vs. 30-31)

What follows is fascinating. First, the men were able to look back on their experience and see Christ in it. "*Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?*" Word and sacrament, scripture and experience, work together to bring us into the presence of the Christ, and one is not complete without the other. They weave in and out; word explaining experience, worship and ritual both underscoring and heightening the meaning of the word. Secondly, they feel compelled to witness, to share with others what has happened to them. They hustle back to Jerusalem to tell the others of their encounter with the risen Christ, of how "*he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*"

The promise to us today is that the Risen Christ does come to us in the midst of our dashed hopes and shattered dreams. The risen Christ comes to us in the Written Word, the Risen Christ comes to us in the Proclaimed Word, the Risen Christ comes to us in the Lived Word of worship and sacrament, the Risen Christ comes to us in our moments of hospitality and generosity with others, both friends and strangers. The Risen Christ comes to us, and never leaves us alone.

Sincerely in Christ, Fr. Jim Trempe