

Homily 3rd Sunday in Easter – Year A 30th April 2016

My wife Kaye and I like to travel. The highlights of our travel can be summed up in two words food and stories. We are not foodies but we love food, we are not authors but we love to relate our experiences, the stories of our journeys. Last year we went on a cruise through South East Asia and one of the high lights was the rice paper rolls at the Heaven Restaurant, Vũng Tàu in Vietnam. When I eat rice paper rolls I compare them with the rolls we had in Vũng Tàu, likewise when we talk with our travelling companions about our trip the conversation quite often leads to that restaurant overlooking the bay at Vũng Tàu. Food and stories are an integral part of what makes us human. For time in memorial humans have sat around camp fires and shared food and stories.

The story on the Road to Emmaus has at its core the theme of hospitality the sharing of food and stories. The theme of doubt and reconciliation is also continued from the story of St Thomas in last week's Gospel. Now I'm not sure how familiar you are with the geography of New Testament Israel, well I'm not so

I consulted a map to find out where Emmaus is or was. Emmaus is to the West of Jerusalem, now you will recall that on Easter Sunday the Angel said to the two Marys “Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: ‘He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.’” If you were heading for Galilee from Jerusalem you would travel due north through Rama, going to Emmaus would be quite out of your way considering you were walking. Unlike us, the readers of Luke’s Gospel would know that if you were walking to Emmaus you were not going to Galilee as Jesus had instructed His disciples to do. In fact it’s highly likely that the two disciples had given up on Jesus. They had seen His execution as a common criminal by the authorities and disheartened they were heading home back to their old lives. The two disciples may have heard of the Resurrection but had dismissed it as fiction a desperate story made up by a group of people trying to justify themselves, sound familiar? Unlike St Thomas they had seen no proof; they had abandoned Jesus, for them Jesus held so much promise but ultimately Jesus was a disappointment.

Jesus meets the disciples on their journey to Emmaus; He meets them in their disappointment, possibly in their anger. I would be angry if I was on that road here was a man I had given three years of my life too, to follow this Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus of Nazareth a man who I thought would prove to be the long awaited Messiah and what happens? He is executed! I'd be angry with Jesus for disappointing me, with the authorities, with myself. Then I meet this person on the road who appears to be the most ill-informed person in all of Jerusalem I would be asking myself: Am I surrounded by idiots?

What is Jesus response? He listens to the disciples' sorry tale as they recount the story of the two Marys and the empty tomb. The disciples' like many of us had failed to understand Jesus part in God's redemptive plan, they we looking for a Messiah who would free Israel, who would act decisively in this world. How often am I like these disciples? When I pray for a particular intention with no apparent result: How often am I disappointed and lose heart? Even though the disciples have abandoned Jesus, He does not abandon them. Jesus is not impressed with their doubts referring to them as foolish men. He does

however explain His role in God's redemptive plan and how scripture was fulfilled. I don't know about you but if I was one of the disciples I would be thinking that's all very well you know nothing about recent events in Jerusalem but you are definitely a biblical scholar. But, how does this change my reality? For me nothing would have changed. Sure the scriptures are fulfilled but does that just make it a 'grand conspiracy of lies' Jesus, the man I followed for three years, is still dead.

We all know how the story unfolds. As they near Emmaus Jesus starts to walk off into the evening. What is important to realise is that Jesus has engaged the disciples, now the outcome is in their hands. Do they say bye and let Him walk off into the evening or do they invite this stranger to stay the night with them? A stranger who seems to understand scripture in great detail and yet had not idea about the goings on in Jerusalem, typical academic: What to do? Do I say: stranger means danger and send him on his way after all he could be a harmless academic or he could be trying to take advantage of me? The disciples offer the stranger hospitality; they invited him in for a meal. And, in that act of hospitality they encountered the risen Jesus and like Thomas their doubts were swept

away before the ultimate truth of the risen Jesus. The message for me is these shattered disciples encounter the risen Jesus through their hospitality to a stranger. In sharing their food and their stories with the outsider they change their lives.

We think our world is a dangerous place, we treat outsiders with distrust, we think that we live in the most unstable of times. But in the 5th Century, with the Roman Empire in collapse and the countryside literally in the hands of the barbarians Europe was a far more dangerous place than it is today. For a traveller to have no refuge at night would mean they would be robbed and most likely murdered. In this environment of violence and mistrust St Benedict wrote his rule for monastics. A Rule that is said to be one of the most important documents in Christendom, a Rule that to most people's amazement has chapters on how to answer the door and reception and accommodation of guest. The Rule stipulates the guest might arrive at any hour of the night and the monastery must be ready to receive them. Why in such a violent and unpredictable society did Benedict see hospitality as being so important, surely it would be more prudent to lock the doors and bar the windows? No because like the

disciples on the road to Emmaus, Benedict wanted his monks and nuns to encounter Christ in the stranger. The stranger with whom we share our stories and our food, the stranger we journey with is Christ. The question for me is: Do I welcome Christ the stranger or do I send him to a detention centre? Why is this important, because, I will be called to account.