

Our Lady of the Airways Parish

Third Sunday of Easter, 2020



Dear Friends in Christ,

“Your faith and hope are set on God” (1 Peter 1:21).

We continue our Easter Season this Sunday with the third post-resurrection appearance of Jesus, that is, his encounter with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. St. Luke begins the gospel account with the words, *“On the first day of the week, two of the disciples were going to a village called Emmaus, about eleven kilometres from Jerusalem, talking with each other about these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus Himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him.”*

As we read these opening lines, a few questions naturally arise within our minds. What does it mean when Luke says that, *“their eyes were kept from recognizing Him”*? Why couldn't the disciples recognize Jesus, who was walking with them on their journey? Alternatively, why did Jesus disguise Himself so that they did not know that He was in their midst? Let us try to answer these questions through the teachings of St. Ignatius of Loyola.

In his work on the *Discernment of Spirits*, Ignatius distinguishes between two states that we can experience within our spiritual life - consolation and desolation. By consolation, Ignatius meant *something happy and uplifting, which instills joy and gives peace. It consists of the grace to feel and recognize God's presence within our lives and prayers, and to shed tears for the love of God.* God often gives us consolations in order to draw us more closely to Himself, and our relationship with Him tends to be very fulfilling because we can sense His Presence.

Ignatius also spoke about desolation. By desolation, Ignatius meant: *darkness of soul, disturbance in it, movement to low and earthly things, disquiet from various agitations and temptations, moving to lack of confidence, without hope, without love, finding one totally slothful, tepid, sad, and as if separated from one's Creator and Lord.* In this state, the things of God seem alien, the Lord appears distant and we are unable to recognize His Presence within our midst.

There are two sources for desolation. Firstly, desolation can be caused by our disordered attachments to something: some habit, some relationship, some idol, or some sadness, disappointment, fear or anxiety. Our attachments to these things are so great that they prevent us from recognizing God's Presence within our lives.

I believe this is what happened to the two disciples in today's story. The disciples had left Jerusalem downcast and were without hope because Jesus, in whom they had placed the whole meaning of their lives, was dead. Their words, *“...we had hoped that He was the one to redeem Israel,”* referred to Jesus as belonging to the past, as a lost opportunity. They failed to see that Jesus was by their side, walking with them, because their minds were in darkness, their hearts numbed, and their entire being enveloped by a profound state of sadness and disappointment.

During this Pandemic period, we are bombarded every day with so much doom and gloom: non-stop reports of Covid-19 related deaths, job losses in the millions, financial hardships and uncertainties, etc. In the face of this continuous onslaught of negativity, we can easily fall into a state of hopelessness, despair, fear and anxiety, and consequently fail to recognize that God is in our midst, that He is walking with us. Although these things are painfully real, our lives are always grounded in something greater, in a life with God. Let us remember that we are a resurrected people! Through Him, we are believers in God who raised Jesus from the dead. Our faith and hope are in Him.

In a sense, we are collectively undergoing a state of desolation because of this Pandemic. With our churches closed, many have been unable to attend Mass, and to receive the Lord's sacramental grace and spiritual consolations. While it undoubtedly very painful not be able to be with the Lord in our usual manner, we can nevertheless use these difficult times as an opportunity to grow in greater love with the Lord and in our love of neighbor.

In fact, the second reason why desolation occurs is because God uses it as a form of trial. To love God is relatively easy when things are going well within our lives; it is undoubtedly harder to love Him in the face of tribulations. Thus, the Lord sometimes 'withdraws' His Presence from us in order to test our resolve, stretch our hearts, and increase our love for Him.

How are we to act when God permits us to experience desolation and withdraws His Presence from us? Saint Mother Teresa offers us a concrete example. In a 1959 letter written to her spiritual director, she wrote, *"In my soul I feel just that terrible pain of loss, of God not wanting me - of God not being God - of God not existing."* Despite feeling a total absence of God's Presence and love for the majority of her life, Saint Teresa continued each day, through an act of the will, to love God and her neighbour. She chose to believe that God was walking with her, despite what her senses told her, and she chose to love and serve the Lord in the poorest of the poor. We, too, can make a similar act of the will.

In today's gospel, the disciples said to each other, *"Were not our hearts burning within us while He was talking to us on the road, while He was opening the Scriptures to us?"* The Lord continues to speak to us when we open the Bible and meditate upon His words. The Lord is still among us especially when we gather in His name: *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* And the Lord continues to hear us when we offer our prayers to Him with simplicity and trust.

As we continue to live during these difficult times, let us remain committed to the Lord, by keeping our faith and hope in Him, and in the knowledge that He is walking with us and amongst us!

Yours in Christ,



Fr. Thomas Lim