

### Reflection for the Third Sunday of Easter

It is not always easy to recognise someone you know, and this difficulty increases if there has been a change in their circumstances or they are, in some way, out of context. It could be that we are absorbed in our own thoughts and concerns and we just do not notice the other person who has waved to us from the other side of the street. I know several people who struggle to remember names and when they meet someone they know, feel embarrassed. They run through a list of names in their head and ask gentle but probing questions to try and get the clues to prod the memory into action. I am not sure that problem will get any easier post 'lockdown', but we will have to cross that bridge when we come to it. I had to reassure my own Mum the other morning when we were on the phone that, yes, we would recognise one another when we do get the chance to meet up again after these weeks of isolation. I know she was half joking but it can be a worry for those in isolation; that fear of losing track of things. But I think it will be ok for when we talk about recognition, I think we are also talking about presence. Presence as well as recognition is about memory, voice, touch, personality, understanding, meaning and ultimately love. Although recognition is not always possible with those people who suffer with dementia, we believe that in some way the presence of others, especially family, is a sign of love and that is beneficial to the person struggling to make sense of a world that has become hard to understand.

That is what is so beautiful about the story of the road to Emmaus – his loving presence, despite their non-recognition. The two disciples on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus do not recognise Jesus as he joins them for the journey: *“And it happened that as they were talking together and discussing it, Jesus himself came near and was walking with them; but their eyes were prevented from recognising him.”* Although they do not recognise Jesus, he stays with them and helps them to understand what has been *“taking place”* in Jerusalem *“these last few days.”* Following his resurrection from the dead what they understood about Jesus has changed dramatically. The two disciples know that Jesus died and was buried but they have also heard of the empty tomb and the vision of the angels and so they are in a state of confusion. It is the presence of Jesus and his explaining the scriptures to them that helps them to believe in his resurrection from the dead. Although they do not recognise him, it is the presence of Jesus and his dialogue with them that moves them on considerably in their journey of faith. This is a God who speaks! Pope Francis has a phrase that he asks us to remember for the purposes of evangelisation and renewal. It is found in his document *The joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*: *“Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.”* (EG 164). The message is clear, although we may not always 'recognise' him, Jesus is by our side each day – turn to him.

There was something about the presence of this person alongside them that made the two disciples press Jesus to stay with them, saying to him: *“Stay with us! It is towards evening, and the day is almost over.”* Then at supper when Jesus took, blessed, broke, and handed the bread to them they recognised him, and he then vanished from their sight. The story that St. Luke's Gospel tells us is that *“they recognised him at the breaking of bread”* and this is what they say to the other disciples on their return to Jerusalem. They became aware of the presence of Jesus through his actions at the supper they shared, he took, blessed, broke, and gave and this resonated with them. Jesus had gone through the same actions during the feeding of the five thousand and at the Last Supper. In their 1998 teaching on the Eucharist *One Bread, One Body*, the then Bishops of England & Wales, Ireland and Scotland state: *“Jesus Christ promised to remain with his disciples until the end of time, and he is with us in many different ways. ...The 'supreme form of Christ's presence' is in the Mass.”* The

presence of the risen Jesus is so powerful that when the bread and wine are consecrated, they become his presence. His presence in the Eucharist continues across our land and indeed the world. Despite our current difficulties the Church still proclaims that we “*recognise him at the breaking of the bread*”. He is still with us.

Word and Sacrament go together and in the reading from the first letter of St. Peter there are some encouraging words: “*Through him you now have faith in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory for that very reason – so that you would have faith and hope in God.* These times are not easy for many and suffering poses a question that seeks an answer. The question is often ‘Where are you Lord?’ Cardinal Basil Hume once said where he looked in the face of great suffering. He said “*...looking at Christ on the Cross, and with the eyes of faith to see behind it the glory of the Resurrection.*”<sup>1</sup>. So, we might say, instead of “where are you?” “*Stay with us Lord!*” For even if the church doors are closed, the Mass is celebrated, the cameras are on and our faith is strong. We can recognise his presence because we believe he is with us. “*Stay with us Lord*” is both our prayer and our belief.

With best wishes and prayers,

Canon David

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<sup>1</sup> Religion and Society: Exploring the Mystery of Man, University of Surrey, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 16<sup>th</sup> Leggett Lecture.