

2020 3RD SUNDAY OF EASTER

Eusebius, a reputable historian who lived in the 4th Century, tells of a long-standing tradition which identifies Cleopas- one of the disciples Jesus met on the road to Emmaus- as Jesus' uncle, the younger brother of Jesus' foster-father, Joseph.

Whether or not this is true is not of world-shattering importance. But there is no doubt that in the early years of the Church the relations of Jesus were held in high esteem.

On Easter Sunday Jesus appeared in the morning at dawn to Mary Magdalene and her woman friends at the tomb. Later, in the afternoon, as we heard in today's Gospel, He appeared to two disciples- probably relations- as they made their way to Emmaus. And in the evening He appeared to the Apostles when they had gathered in the Upper Room for a meal.

We hear in the Pentecost account in Luke's Acts of the Apostles that those awaiting in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit fifty days later were from the same three groups. There were the twelve Apostles, some women disciples including Jesus' mother, Mary, and the brothers of the Lord- meaning Jesus' close relations. One of those 'brothers of the Lord' would most certainly have been Cleopas.

In today's Gospel we focus upon the two disciples trudging to Emmaus on Easter Sunday afternoon. They were depressed and deeply hurt. They had loved Jesus and had had enormous expectations of Him. But He had been executed in the cruellest possible way.

Some women had said that they had seen Him risen from the dead. What rubbish! They trudged away from Jerusalem disappointed, hurting and feeling hopeless; ex-disciples of a dead prophet. Jesus' Death had ended their wonderful expectations.

When a stranger joined them on the road, they told the story of their disappointment. Only after they have finished their own story did the stranger begin speaking. He invited them to look at Jesus' ministry and death on the Cross in the light of Scripture. And He showed how Jesus' life and His death on the Cross were in total harmony with what had been ordained in the Prophecies of the Old Testament for the Messiah. He explained how Jesus' sacrificial death on the Cross was essential if Jesus was to be, in truth, the

Redeemer of mankind. According to the stranger, the death of Jesus was the climax of His mission- not the collapse of it.

Cleopas and his companion invited the stranger to eat with them when they came to the inn at Emmaus. It was then- when the stranger broke the bread to be shared among them- just as the Master had always done- that their eyes were opened to the reality that the stranger was in fact Jesus, risen from the dead. At that moment He disappeared from them. He left them with their eyes alight. For now they were able to shine the light of Easter Sunday back into the darkness of Good Friday and see everything differently. Jesus was risen; was risen indeed. He was in truth the Son of God.

Our own stories this day may not sound very different from that of the two forlorn disciples on the road to Emmaus. The horrible reality of the corona virus has plunged the whole world into a sense of hopelessness.

Like the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, we must open our eyes to see what is happening with the eyes of faith.

Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, in a sermon delivered on Good Friday in the Vatican to Pope Francis said: “God is **our** ally. God is **not** the ally of the virus. If these scourges were punishments from God, it would have to be explained why they strike equally the good and the bad and why the poor usually bear the worst consequences of them. No! The Lord Jesus Who cried when he learnt of Lazarus’ death cries today for the scourge that has fallen on humanity. Yes, God “suffers” like every father and like every mother. God participates in our pain. And be assured that God will bring forth good out of evil.”

As the world strives to cope with and finally defeat this scourge, we, people of faith, know that Jesus Who is Infinite Love is walking alongside us in our pain; just as He did with Cleopas and his friend on that Easter Sunday afternoon. He is helping scientists to come to an understanding of how to defeat the virus. He is giving us all courage and generosity to cope with the restrictions we are all facing. If nothing else, the virus has stripped us of our delusions of omnipotence- reminding us that we are mortal, that we are dependent on our All-loving God.

We pray that in days to come we may all, like the two disciples, be able to look back on this present calamity and see it as a time which, although tragic, brought forth mighty graces.

