

The Deacon's Bench



by Deacon
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3rd Sunday of Easter: Turning Away, Turning Back

Reflections
on Sacred
Scripture

Easter time, the celebration of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus, is a foretaste of the 'Great Day of the Lord'. Resurrection is so impactful we celebrate Easter for forty days, not just one. And during this great season of joy, we hear a first reading at Mass from the Acts of the Apostles rather than from the Hebrew Scriptures we commonly call the Old Testament. The Book of Acts, part two of Saint Luke's Gospel, presents us with the preaching of the early Church and a picture of how the Christian faith became rooted in community.

Today the Apostle Peter preaches the basic Gospel of resurrection of Jesus and the amazement that he has conquered death. He says, "God raised this Jesus, of this we are all witnesses." He points to great signs of the working of the Holy Spirit among the people as proof that Jesus is alive. But even in the face of such excitement and demonstrations of power, the reality is that just a short time before, Jesus had been crucified, publicly executed by hanging on a cross and to die for all to see. A terrible and heartbreaking event for his followers.

In the wake of the crucifixion, apparently two of the disciples were getting out of town. This is the story of the 'Road to Emmaus'. Perhaps Cleopas and his companion were running away from the community of which they were a part, turning away from the faith that had been so sorely challenged. It happens to most of us when we are faced with tragedy or with suffering and grief that overwhelm us. We turn away. We take a different road.

While the two disciples were on their way, along the road a stranger joined them in their journey. Not unusual, safety in numbers along a road between towns. The stranger was interested in what they were discussing – and of course, they were discussing the terrible events of Good Friday and that the one they thought would be their savior, the one who would set them free from the Romans' rule, had been tragically executed. How could anyone not know about this? "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?"

Seeing they are open to hearing, the 'Stranger' who is Jesus (unrecognized as he is in most post-resurrection appearances) proceeds to help them understand the prophets, to understand the plan God had to liberate Israel and indeed all of humanity from death. Who are the strangers we will meet? Will we be the 'stranger' for others? To this day, we are 'all witnesses' of the resurrection.