

## Easter 3

1. This is, as many have said, one of the most beautiful accounts of the appearance of the risen Lord to his followers. It is found only in Luke's gospel. In addition to its beauty it is also crystal clear in the two main points it wants to make: Jesus is to be recognized in the Sacred Scriptures and in the bread of the Eucharist.

2. We can also see in this story what the situation was in the first few days after the crucifixion. Some of the disciples, like these two, thought everything was all over for them. They were now leaving Jerusalem, no doubt trying to imagine a new life for themselves without Jesus. He had not turned out to be the person they thought he was going to be: the messiah who would liberate Israel from the Romans. Therefore they had to reconstruct a new life without him. They had to go back to where they were before they met him and began to follow him.

3. And when Jesus appears to them, they don't recognize him. Usually we take that to mean that somehow the Lord had a different appearance, or if not that, then that somehow their eyes were not functioning well. But there is another way of understanding this failure to recognize Jesus on the physical level.

It is a symbol of their inability to recognize him on a deeper level. They could not recognize him because they were looking for the wrong kind of messiah. They were looking for a conquering messiah. Now Jesus has to take them through their Jewish Scriptures and open their eyes to see that these scriptures presented a different kind of messiah, a suffering messiah. So we read in our story: “Beginning, then, with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them every passage of Scripture which referred to him.” In other words, this story tells us that the disciples, even after the Lord’s death, still did not understand what Jesus was about. They had to be taught, they had to be convinced even after his death that Jesus was a different kind of Messiah than most people had expected, than what they themselves had expected.

4. And yet, as far as I can see, the clinching argument for recognizing Jesus in this story is not the reinterpretation of the Scriptures but the meal. They say to him: “Stay with us. It is nearly evening—the day is practically over.” He accepts their invitation. When they sit down to eat and he takes the bread and blesses it and gives it to them, their eyes are opened.

5. When we celebrate the Eucharist, our eyes should be opened in this twofold way. We should recognize Jesus in the Sacred

Scriptures and in the consecrated Bread. For many years we Catholics emphasized Jesus' presence in the Eucharist, but we did not pay much attention to the Scriptures. But since Vatican II that situation has changed. We listen to the Scriptures in our own tongue and can understand them. And the church encourages us to read the Scriptures. Indeed, we who attend Sunday Mass and we who attend daily Mass are being formed again and again by the Scriptures.

6. And yet, just as in this gospel, there is a primacy in our Catholic hearts reserved for the Eucharist. Words are many; words can be emptied of their meaning. Words can deceive. But when words are few and when they point to one simple action, they grow strong. So it is with the Eucharistic words. They are few: "This is my body given for you; this is my blood poured out for you." They point to one particular action which took place on one particular afternoon at one particular place and under a particular set of circumstances never again to be repeated: the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth. There—and no where else and never again—Jesus laid down his life for us. That is what we celebrate in every Eucharist, and perhaps that is why it is more deeply implanted in us than the Scriptures. The Scriptures are vast. We need them to understand the life of Jesus. But this one action and the few words which

describe it telescope the entire meaning of all the Scriptures into one event, that of the crucifixion.

Yes, we want to recognize the Lord in the Scripture and in the bread. But it is the bread which says it all for us. Let us never grow careless in our reception of it. May it always be new for us. Let it always open our eyes so that we may recognize Jesus in it and live our lives in and through the strength it gives us.