

BELIEF AND UNBELIEF

Reflections for the Third Sunday of Easter, Cycle A

The following are three reflections on today's beautiful gospel. I have mislaid the names of the writers of reflections one and two.

Reflection # 1- Moving from Unbelief to Belief

All of us have taken a trip at one time or another in our lives.

We take trips for business purposes or for pleasure or for both. A trip might even consist of merely going across town to shop or to visit people we love and care about.

For these, and many other reasons, people travel.

Today's Gospel was a story about two disciples who were taking a trip. Cleopas and another unnamed person were taking a short trip from Jerusalem to Emmaus-about seven miles. Of course, they were walking.

They had hoped that Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet who had been powerful in word and deed, the one who had been condemned to death and crucified, was the one who would free the Jews from Roman domination.

There had been a story, too, that Jesus was alive. But these two did not believe such a rumor. In the early evening they picked up a hitchhiker and together they discussed the Old Testament.

When it came time for dinner, they invited the stranger walking with them to join them, The man did, and when He broke bread with them their eyes were opened to the fact that their guest was Jesus.

These two disciples traveled from doubt to despair to faith in the resurrection of Jesus.

We, too, are on a trip. We spend our lives traveling-not only for business, or pleasure, or visiting-but from doubt and despair to faith in the resurrection of Jesus. We do not travel the physical road of the two disciples; but, we travel the same road of faith.

As we travel this road of faith we find that we are sojourning in what appears to be a strange land. We doubt and despair in times of sickness when either we or someone we know we love finds that he or she has cancer, or AIDS, or some other terminal disease. That's when we travel a road of doubt asking why this would happen to such a person. If there is a God, why does he permit such things to happen?

Then somehow, sooner or later, God breaks through into our lives. We come to accept our human limitations, learn how to share in suffering, toss aside our anger with God, and see how God is at work in our lives through this sickness.

We travel the road of doubt and despair to belief like those disciples of old.

We also travel this same road when we experience a death in our families. The death of a loved one brings on doubt and despair. Why do we have to die? Why does God take people? What will happen to me now that my spouse is gone? These are just some of the questions that indicate a time of doubt and despair. If death occurred as the result of an accident or suicide, the doubt and despair are even greater.

As death is dealt with and accepted, as people work through their grief, they gradually come to life again. They travel the road from doubt and despair to belief as did those two disciples walking to Emmaus.

We spend our whole lives making this trip over and over again. Each one of us knows this road well. We are

constantly taking this trip from doubt and despair to faith.

As we make our way from doubt and despair to faith, we experience the resurrection of Jesus; we discover Jesus alive and with us. Sometimes we are so caught up in our doubt and despair we cannot see Jesus as he travels with us.

The two disciples were also blinded by their doubt and despair. They could not see that the hitchhiker, who made their hearts burn, was Jesus with them.

The very moments of doubt and despair are themselves signs of God at work in our lives. God works through us, just as he once did with Jesus.

Doubts and despairs, while not pleasant experiences, can be the signs and wonders that reveal to us the God who raised Jesus from the dead. These are our credentials showing that God is with us as we travel through life.

God often chooses strange signs to move us from doubt and despair to faith.

He chose the crucifixion and death's bitter pangs of his own son to reveal the fullness of a life of faith.

Likewise, God chooses the everyday doubts and despair of our lives as we make our sojourn, our life's trip, to enable us to experience faith.

If we find that our hearts burn within us while we doubt, and when we find we despair on our trips, then sooner or later our eyes will be opened and we will recognize Jesus with us; whereupon he will vanish from our sight, waiting for another opportunity to travel with us and bring us to faith once again in his resurrection. He is with us throughout our lifetime trials.

Reflection #2-Meditation for Our Journey

We are once again pilgrims on the road to Emmaus. Our heads, that were bowed, roused as we meet the stranger who draws near and comes with us. As evening comes, we strain to make out his face while he talks to us, to our hearts. In interpreting the Book of Life, he takes our broken hopes and kindles them into fire: the way becomes lighter as, drawing the embers together, we learn to fan the flame. If we invite him this evening, he will sit down and together we shall share the meal. And then all those who no longer believed will see and the Hour of Recognition will come. He will break the bread of tears at the table of the poor and each will receive manna to their fill. We shall return to Jerusalem to proclaim aloud what he has whispered in our ear. And no doubt we shall find brothers and sisters there who will greet us with the words: "We, too have met him." For we know the mercy of God has come to visit the land of the living!

Reflection #3-Everybody Has a Faith Story

The following piece is by Fr. Flor McCarthy:

Today's Gospel is all about story-telling. Those two disciples had a story to tell, one full of disappointment and disillusionment. It was really bothering them. Jesus showed such delicacy by joining them as a stranger. People often find it easier to unburden on a stranger. Straightaway he showed an interest in their lives by asking them what they were talking about. Thus, he created a climate in which they felt like talking. And they did talk. They poured out their sad story to him.

Then what did he do? He began to tell his own story. For them the cross had been an insurmountable obstacle. It had signaled the end of their interest in Christ. but, now Christ showed them how the Scriptures had foretold the cross. He showed them that the cross, far from being the end of the dream, was paradoxically the means by which it became a reality. He helped them to find a meaning in their story by showing them the meaning he had found in his own. Thus, he enabled them to turn their lives around.

As said earlier, everybody has a story to tell. Everybody wants to be taken seriously. Alas, many never get a chance to

tell their stories. They never encounter someone to whom they can unwind, someone who will listen to their story and say: "It's okay." To accept one's story means there is no longer any room for self-hatred. It is especially by accepting the dark side of our story that we learn what God's grace and love are all about. However, in the final analysis it is only the Christ Story (glory achieved through a sharing in his suffering and death) that helps us to make ultimate sense of our own story. Anything else is simply not adequate.

Every human story is the story of a journey, the journey of life. Christ is with us on this journey, even when we don't recognize him; but we must not see our journey in isolation anymore. We are members of the people of God. This means we make the journey to the Father's Kingdom together.

"Wherever people have lived there is a story to be told."

Reflection Questions

Can you relate your faith story? When did God open your eyes to his presence? What about the Scriptures? Can you use them for spiritual reading or do they continue to be too difficult or dry? We can be sure God wants to break open his word for each of us. Many have found that the *Small Christian Communities* are one place where that happens for them. If interested in more information on our Small Christian Communities, call Deacon Mike at 254-1595 ext 3076 or email him at mmcelwee@ascensioncatholicsch.org.

QUOTE

I sought to see the Face of God,
I climbed the highest steeple,
But God declared, Go down again,
I dwell among my people.
(John Henry Cardinal Newman)