

3rd Sunday of Easter, Year "A"

"Were not our hearts burning within us while He spoke to us?"

I may not be able to testify to the veracity of this WhatsApp story, but it does have a good lesson to teach all who are struggling to make peace with their past or with God.

According to the story, a relatively young priest was in a hospital visiting some of his parishioners. While walking down the hallway, a nun stops him and says, "Father, can you go into this room? There's a man on his deathbed. He's been here for days. We've asked priests to go in, but he chases everyone away. He doesn't want to talk about Jesus. But he's dying. Could you please visit him?"

The priest goes in and introduces himself to the patient. The guy erupts and starts cursing at him. He is so angry: "I don't want anything to do with you. Get out of here!" The priest says, "Okay," and goes out into the hall.

The nun is still there. She says, "Could you go back in?"

The priest replies, "He doesn't want anything I have to offer."

"Just give it another chance," pleads the nun.

The priest reluctantly re-enters the room. "I'm not going to ask if you want to go to confession. I'm not going to ask if you want Holy Communion. But is it okay if I just sit here next to your bed and pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy?"

The old man replies, "I don't care. Do whatever you want."

The priest sits down and begins softly praying the words of the Divine Mercy Chaplet: "For the sake of His sorrowful Passion; have mercy on us and on the whole world. For the sake of His sorrowful Passion; have mercy on us and on the whole world...."

Suddenly the man bursts out, "Stop it!"

Startled, the priest looks up and asks, "Why?"

"Because there is no mercy for me!"

"Why do you think there is no mercy for you?" asks the priest.

"It doesn't matter," responds the old man.

But the priest persists, "Why do you think there is no mercy for you?"

"I'll tell you. Twenty-five years ago, I was working for the railroad. My job was to lower the crossing guard arm when a train would come to prevent cars from going on the tracks. But one night I was drunk. I didn't lower the crossing guard arm, and a couple and their three young children were on the tracks as a train came, and they were all instantly killed. That was my fault. So there is no mercy for me. I have failed. It is over."

The priest just sits there staring at the rosary in his hands. Finally he asks, "Where was this?" The man tells him the name of the town.

The priest looks up and says, "Twenty-five years ago, my mom and my dad were taking my little siblings on a trip. I couldn't go with them. They were driving through this small town. For some reason the railroad crossing guard arm wasn't lowered. As they were crossing the tracks, a train came and killed them all. I lost my whole family that night." The priest gazes intently into the man's face and says, "My brother, God forgives you. Not only that, I forgive you."

The man realizes that God's mercy is for him. The priest asks, "Would you let me hear your confession and give you the Eucharist?"

The man makes his confession and receives Holy Communion. Two days later, he died. Mercy wins. His failure is not final.... (Copied)

Like the dying man, the disciples on the road to Emmaus think that the death of Jesus was the end of a good and entertaining story. The one they had put their hope in has disappointed them, hence, the end of the journey ... the end of a beautiful story.

These disciples have grown in their admiration of Jesus as the superstar who has come to restore the kingdom to Israel. Before the people, Jesus displayed such amazing power and wisdom in understanding. All were looking up to Him as the awaited messiah who will bring glad tidings to the poor. And before their eyes, Jesus made the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, and the message of salvation is preached to all.

Death on the cross was an unimaginable and unacceptable option. Seeing Jesus die on the cross was the end of all their dreams; hence, they were going back to their hometown to return to their former way of life. In this journey, their disappointment knew no bounds since they had left everything to follow Jesus; going back to their kin was nothing but appalling. They were going to become the laughing stock of many who were waiting to tell them, "Did I not warn you about that Jesus?"

The inability of the disciples on the road to Emmaus to recognize the stranger (Jesus) in their midst showed the depth of their disappointment. But to show that there was still an element of the blood of Jesus running in their veins, they were still open to listening to the stranger speak to them about the message of the prophets concerning the Christ.

They understood the message preached to them but failed to recognize the preacher. In this we see the effect of living our lives with the mentality of a failure. It is certain that everyone shall be disappointed at a point in his or her life. It could be early or late in one's life. If like the Jewish disciples of Jesus, you are wired to expect or think you deserve the best, and then you are let down and don't get it, disappointment and letdown can actually trigger depression.

You may begin to ruminate over things you should've, could've, or would've done differently if you had listened. How we handle our disappointments could define our character. The disciples thought that the best way to handle their disappointment was to return to their former way of life. Jesus thinks otherwise, and in this encounter, Jesus presents to the disciples the tool of trade for handling disappointments. Jesus brings them back to the Word of God preached by the prophets, and it is at the breaking of the bread that they recognized Jesus.

Like the disciples, the coronavirus pandemic has put human life at a crossroads. We think we deserve the best. We are all looking for the way forward. Like the disciples, no one gets through life without disappointment; some disappointments are bigger than others. Like the disciples, we need to make a radical shift – from looking inward they moved on to look at something more powerful – the Word of God and the Eucharist, which simply put is the mass. It is my hope that as we return to the public celebration of the mass once again, the Word of God and the Body of Christ shall rejuvenate us to overcome all the disappointments and losses due to the coronavirus pandemic. May the risen Lord be our hope, Alleluia ... Amen.