

No.4

16th April 2020.

Dear Friends,

We now enter the season of Easter which takes us through to the feast of Pentecost - and the coming of the Holy Spirit - fifty days after the Resurrection of Jesus.

Normally in RCIA we have a break from regular sessions for a couple of weeks but in these extraordinary times we are still “keeping in touch”. Since no talk had been allocated to this week I have taken the liberty to offer a reflection on Easter based on Pope Benedict XVI’s book : “*Jesus of Nazareth*” at the point when two disciples of Jesus on Easter Sunday are travelling from Jerusalem to Emmaus. I hope you find it of interest and useful.

Meanwhile, if you have any questions or comments on the content of these newsletters please feel free to let me know via email : (“madewaal@hotmail.com”)

Keep safe, God bless us all,

John de Waal

A Reflection for Easter.

St Luke tells us that on the very day that Jesus rose from the dead two of his disciples were leaving Jerusalem and walking to a nearby village named Emmaus. They had heard the report from the women who had discovered the empty tomb but, we are told, did not believe them. Not surprisingly, the two disciples were “downcast”. It was then that Jesus joined them on their journey but “*something prevented them from recognising him.*” Jesus asked them why they were so distraught and they told him about what had happened in Jerusalem. Jesus chides them and says they are “*slow to to believe the full message of the prophets*”.



“Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory.”

From a human perspective it is not surprising that they found it hard to believe. The Resurrection sounds absurd. Jesus’ death on the cross seemed like abject failure. And yet Jesus began to change their minds to the extent that their hearts *“burned within them”* at his words.

Having persuaded Jesus to stay with them for supper they still did not recognise him until they were *“at table, when he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And then their eyes were opened.”* Jesus then disappears from their sight and they hurried back to Jerusalem to tell the Apostles. *“They told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him in the breaking of the bread.”*

In his book: *“Jesus of Nazareth”* Benedict XVI considers what passages from the Scriptures Jesus might have used to explain what had happened over the past few days. He concentrates on two in particular : Psalm 22 - which begins with the words used by Jesus on the Cross : *“My God, my God why have you forsaken me?”* and the passage from the prophet Isaiah (verse 53) which tells of *“the Suffering Servant”*.

“Psalm 22 pervades the whole Passion story and points beyond it. The public humiliation, the mockery ... the pain, the piercing of Jesus’ hands and feet,

the casting of lots for his garments - the whole Passion is, as it were, anticipated in the psalm. Yet when Jesus utters the opening words of the psalm, the whole of the great prayer is essentially already present- including the certainty of an answer to prayer, to be revealed in the Resurrection."

Throughout their history the Jews had a volatile relationship with God - often falling away from obedience to their Covenant with him. Each time they experienced difficulties they would complain about God's apparent silence. They would "cry" out in anguish. Each time God would give them another chance. In the same Psalm 22 this cry of desolation eventually turns to hope :

*"From thee comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.
The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord!
May your hearts live forever!"*

Their prayers were answered. What begins in despair ends in hope and triumph. What's more, this happy conclusion is not just for the Jews but for ALL : *"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord and all the families of the nations shall worship before him."*

No doubt, also, Jesus pointed out to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus the words of Isaiah : *"He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ... he was despised and we esteemed him not"* - not the image of the Messiah most hoped for but it was the reality of what came to pass in Jesus. The early Church recognised this in the Resurrection. Out of apparent disgrace and failure came the victory over Death itself.

A final thought : they recognised Jesus in *"the breaking of the bread."*

For us as Christians this has an obvious eucharistic dimension but before that there is another lesson to be learnt. "Breaking bread" has a long traditional meaning of showing hospitality. The head of the family or household - especially in the Jewish tradition - would begin a meal by thanking God. He would then distribute what was to be eaten. In some sense this action by the head of the family was understood to represent God, the Father, who gives us everything through the



earth's bounty, all that we need for life. It was also a gesture of hospitality, through which the stranger is given a share in what is one's own; he is welcomed into table fellowship. Breaking and distributing; it is the act of distributing that creates a community. This archetypally human gesture of giving, sharing and uniting acquires an entirely new depth in Jesus' Last Supper through his gift of himself. God's bountiful distribution of gifts takes on a radical quality when the Son communicates and distributes himself in the form of bread.

"The Eucharist is also a visible process of gathering ... it involves entering into communion with the living God, who draws people together. The Church comes into being with the Eucharist. She receives her unity and mission from the Eucharist. She is derived from the Last Supper, that is to say, from Christ's Death and Resurrection, which he anticipated in the gift of his Body and Blood."

Suggested readings for Lectio :

Psalm 22.

St Luke's Gospel : ch.24 vv.13 - 35.

Letter to the Hebrews : 4 :14-16; 5: 7-9.

A prayer for our time?

What more can you ask? - a prayer.

God's love endures forever
What a wonderful thing to know
When the tides of life run against you
And your spirit is downcast and low.

God's kindness is ever around you,
Always ready to freely impart
Strength to your faltering spirit,
Cheer to your lonely heart.

God's presence is ever beside you,
As near as the reach of your hand,
You have but to tell him your troubles
There's nothing he won't understand.

And knowing God's love is unfailing,
And his mercy unending and great
You have but to trust in His promise -
God comes not too soon nor too late.

So wait with a heart that is patient,
For the goodness of God to prevail -
For never do prayers go unanswered,
And His mercy and love never fail.

Solitary Strength by Corrie ten Boom.

“We must not be too dependent on meetings. You and I are what we are alone. Find your satisfaction in Jesus Christ. Talk with him, listen to him, look at him.

‘I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me.’ (Philippians 4:13)

Lord, make me independent of conditions. I thank you that you are the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.”

from : “Each New Day” by Corrie ten Boom

Corrie ten Boom was a very courageous Dutch Christian during the War who - with her family - suffered in concentration camps because they had sheltered Jews. Corrie survived but knew how bad “conditions” could be in living her faith.

On a lighter note:

Our son, Johnny, lives in Shoreham and like most streets all the neighbours come out to their doors at 8pm on a Thursday evening to clap the NHS. One of his neighbours goes for a run every evening as his daily exercise. On a Thursday he always times it so that he returns - running up their road - at 8pm! It is like a grandstand finish with everyone applauding!