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Easter Message, 2021

“The two recounted what had taken place on the way and how He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.” Luke 24:35

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

One of the most interesting and often puzzling aspects about the appearances of our Lord after His resurrection is that in most cases, those to whom He appears fail to recognize Him. Mary Magdalen, the Apostles, and the two disciples on the road to Emmaus all fail to recognize that it is Jesus with whom they are speaking, at first. The ways in which the Lord reveals His identity to them through these interactions can teach us about the power of the Resurrection, as well as give us some food for thought about our own encounters with the Risen Lord who continues to make His presence known to us!

In the particular appearance to the disciples journeying on the Road to Emmaus, Jesus draws near and begins to speak with them. St. Luke, who narrates the account for us, includes an interesting detail: “their eyes were prevented from recognizing him...” (Lk 24:16b) This sounds like Jesus deliberately concealed his identity from them. The Lord likewise seemed to conceal Himself or His intentions twice more throughout the interaction – both when He asked why they appeared to be upset, and when He “pretended” that He is going to continue His journey beyond the town itself. This can sound somewhat shocking to us: why would Jesus do that? The answer is that He wanted to inspire and strengthen their faith, not simply give an “easy” answer to their longing and questions. In other words, He had a deeper purpose in remaining “hidden” to them for the time being.

Jesus asked these disciples to recount what had taken place in Jerusalem so that He, the Word made flesh, could explain and break open the Word of God for them. Jesus gave the impression of going on farther so that, at supper, when the Lord took the bread, said the blessing, broke and gave it to them, the disciples would recognize Jesus in the Most Holy Eucharist – the way the Risen Lord Jesus has chosen to remain with us until the end of time, hidden to our senses, under the humble appearances of bread and wine!

What does this mean for us? By reflecting on this resurrection appearance on the first Easter as recounted in the Gospel, we too are called to recognize that although the Lord Jesus may be hidden from our physical eyes, it is the very same risen Lord who is present to us when we read Holy Scripture and gather together to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. This begs an important question: Do we really believe this? Do we not only live, but orient our lives, i.e., prioritize how we live and use the time we have been given us in a way that acknowledges this profound reality?

It seems that we are also reminded that when we are downcast because of the situation of our lives, wearied as we have been throughout the past year due to the ongoing pandemic for example, Jesus draws near and speaks words of comfort and hope to us. Sometimes Jesus conceals his presence among us as a way to challenge us to deepen our faith in Him, and in His enduring presence among us in both Word and Sacrament. But dear brothers and sisters, once we do recognize Him and encounter the power of His presence, most of all in the Holy Eucharist, we, like those first disciples, are called to go forth and tell others so that they might believe that Jesus is real; that He is alive; that He is truly risen, and that He continues to make Himself, and the redeeming grace He won for us present in so many ways!

Please be assured of my prayerful closeness to you all, particularly in these challenging times. May you and your loved ones have a truly blessed and grace-filled Easter!

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Bishop of Norwich