

3rd Sunday of Eastertide (A)

23rd April 2023

'Invite Jesus into your home, invite Him to walk with you!'

Acts 2: "You killed Him, but God raised Him to life." Ps 15: You will not
leave my soul amongst the dead. 1Pt 1: Through Him you now have faith in God,
who raised Him from the dead. Lk 24: 13–35: the road to Emmaus

Walking in the countryside has always been a part of my life, and any holiday, for me, should ideally involve access to places where I can walk in the natural landscape. This is not really a surprise: my Mum & Dad meant, in the 60s, in a Catholic walking club based in London, and so did both my uncles and their wives — in the *same* walking group! — and so we grew up as a family with country walking, esp. on Sunday afternoons, being a normal part of family life. I'm sure, weather permitting, I shall be out walking again tomorrow with my Dad, as it's the season for bluebells, and we know some particularly fine bluebell woods near us!

When we all had to go into lockdown 3yrs ago, I was able to exercise this happy activity of country walking rather more than I had ever had time to, before, in my life as a parish priest, and I discovered so much more of that part of Hertfordshire county and its wonderful array of

walks and footpaths. On the walks I took in those early days of the pandemic, I don't think I saw a drop of rain; but instead just the brilliant signs of nature bursting with life: the bright greens of hillsides and of budding trees in bright sunshine; of carpets of countless thousands of bluebells in various woods and coppices; of so many butterflies everywhere. No doubt those things had always been there, but the chance to be out, alone, and in nice weather, brought them so much to the fore: I noticed all that life springing forth in Eastertime / springtime.

The 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus, in that famous passage from Lk 24 that we heard in the Gospel today, were on a walk, into the country away from Jerusalem, but they certainly weren't looking properly, and they weren't ready to see signs of new life. "Their faces [were] downcast," we are told. They were despondent, taken up with their anxieties, not having eyes open to see what was happening around them. How might we imagine their thinking, as they trudge along the road, downcast? — isolated from their community, upset by the sudden tragedy

of death, thinking that ‘everything has collapsed,’ not knowing what will happen now, just heading home and going to stay in, unsure when to risk coming out again. Maybe we sometimes get into a pattern of thinking that is a bit the same — despondent about something that has happened, or irritation at the way the world is ...

Into this situation, for sure, Jesus comes. As surely as He did on the road to Emmaus for Cleopas and his companion, Jesus always comes and walks alongside us. We must not doubt it! We must not have our eyes closed as those disciples did! — we must have our eyes opened to Jesus who comes and walks with us, reassuring us and explaining to us, in His own divine logic, what has happened, and what will happen. There are three key features of the Lord’s approach to those disheartened disciples: (i) the **Scriptures**; (ii) the **invitation to stay** with them; and (iii) the **Eucharist**. These are three ways in which we can most certainly know that the Lord Jesus walks with us, speaks to us, and strengthens us with a sight that is clear and not downcast.

(i) The first, then, is to **open your hearts to the Scriptures**. In this present time, the Easter season, what better to ponder than the richness of the bible texts, especially those that give us the Good News of the Resurrection. Think of the ways Jesus so often used Scripture to explain His message, and how the apostles and their early collaborators committed Jesus’s own powerful words and saving deeds to a remembered oral form, and then to writing. Read the Scriptures, then, in whatever way is best for you, even just a few verses of the Gospel a day. A suggestion I’d strongly make to you, at this season, is to read the *Acts of the Apostles*. Have you ever read the Acts of the Apostles? It’s very straightforward reading, and a unique book of the NT; but really full of strong encouragement as the apostles draw strength from Jesus whom they know walks with them. “*Did not our hearts burn within us as He talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures?*” Jesus can truly speak to us, personally, calmly, as we read the sacred Word.

(ii) **Invite Jesus into your home!** Like the disciples at

Emmaus, make sure you have actually brought Jesus truly into your home, into your room. Would someone walking into your student room now, know that you are a Christian, a Catholic? Make sure you are bringing Jesus into your home, and making it a holy place ... through placing a crucifix prominently at the heart of your room, and maybe an image also of Our Lady or another saints; making your room a holy place. It's important for us to live and believe that the Lord dwells with us through the Spirit He has given us, so: not side-lining Him but making Him at home in your home, a welcome guest, a beloved friend.

(iii) And then, the **Holy Eucharist**. The culmination of Jesus's time with the disciples in Emmaus was His revelation to them at the offering of the Eucharist. In this term, which may be devoid of some other activities, and amidst the stresses of exam season, continue to make the Eucharist, that privileged encounter with Jesus Christ, a priority. Especially on Sunday, of course, but also if possible on some weekdays, unite yourself intimately with Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, His loving and living

presence. Weekday Mass continues right through, Mon–Fri 5.30pm here, and could be the very oasis of peace that you need in these weeks of study and revision. Jesus never leaves us; He is always here by our side, and He is most precious and intimately with us at Mass. Let's receive His gifts, His grace, His presence, as He offers them, especially in times when we might feel challenged, or even prone to being downcast. He raises our eyes to Him, and our minds and hearts, to see that He *is* truly with us.

I want to offer a final dimension of this Emmaus event for you, and that's not so much about inviting Jesus to walk closely with you, but to remind you that you are called to walk closely with others and introduce them to Jesus. I remember a long time ago, when I was a student — it might have been at Worth Abbey on a retreat or a reunion — that we all took part in an 'Emmaus Walk.' This was an exercise of prayer, where the whole group began together, maybe hearing this very Gospel of Lk 24, and then, in randomly selected pairs one went out from the prayer group for a walk, perhaps for an hour, the first half

of it in talking and sharing, and the second part of it in prayerful silence. I remember whom I walked with — her name was Nicky, someone I knew, but not well; I think she was a dentistry student. The idea was that by walking out with this person, not as a social encounter, but a prayerful one, you could share how you each saw Jesus walking with you through life, and could experience and encourage each other in that walk; then in the silent half you could hold each other in prayer as you allowed Jesus Himself to walk with you and do the communicating.

I describe this because I think it's an image of the model that we as practising Catholics should be modelling day to day with those around us. We are not walking (socializing, studying) alongside others in a meaningless random way, but in a way that is really an Emmaus Walk. In other words, we can and should be thinking of those we live our lives with as walking with *Jesus* as well as with us. And if the other has no knowledge of Our Lord, then to introduce him or her to Jesus. This can naturally come about if we are using those very same sacred instruments

that Our Lord used on the Road to Emmaus, as I have already described: the regular use of the Scriptures; the elements of your dwelling that announce Jesus dwells there too; and most especially the Holy Eucharist. There is space here in the chapel, as you can see: there's space for your friend! You can walk them here! I mean, I know you can't march them here against their will, but some who are close to you might very much wish to walk here with you, and to experience the Lord. You never know how the Lord will touch their hearts simply through the mystery of the Mass; the Lord is powerful in His sacramental presence, and can very suddenly & lovingly call a heart to love Him.

So, alongside the other pressing duties of this term, think about that: it's your responsibility and possibility, to bring others here, to meet Our Lord; to walk with Him, and with them, to allow them to meet. As you invite them, so He also will strengthen you, and give your faith a fresh focus: *“did not our hearts burn within us as He talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us? ... And their eyes were opened at the Breaking of the Bread.”*