

National Minister's Occasional Message



Beloved National Family,

As all good Franciscan gatherings should begin, the National Formation Workshop May 12-15 in Belleville Illinois began in prayer, breaking open the Scriptures and sharing the Good News with one another.

Led by our beloved Friar Richard Trezza OFM, the Scripture passage selected was the Easter Gospel of Jesus with the two apostles on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35, <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/luke/luke24.htm>). Biblical scholars will tell us that most of the Easter narratives in the Gospels feature an empty tomb and/or a non-recognition of the Risen Lord. Here we have the latter, where on the road to Emmaus, these two disciples of Jesus, who have journeyed with the Lord, seen His works and wonders, yet now after His death and resurrection do not recognize Him, even though He clearly recognizes them and journeys with them despite their lack of recognition or understanding.

I think as Secular Franciscans we might journey with this Gospel for all of Easter. Now no human explanation can fully "exhaust" any Gospel passage, as the divine will always exceed the human, but permit me to share the following with you.

I love this story! It is a perfect story for our lay spirituality. Clearly, these disciples are not of the Eleven. They are not the predecessors of our Bishops.

They are "ordinary" followers of our Lord, as I hope are all of us. Now there has always been much speculation as to who was the other disciple with Cleopas. I am going to side with those Biblical scholars who have argued that this other disciple was none other than Mary, the wife of Cleopas, previously mentioned in the Gospels, even seen so recently at the very foot of our Lord's Cross (John 19:25).

I would like to know about this Mary, but in the Hebrew writings and early Christian writings, women do not receive many speaking parts, nor much name recognition. On the other hand, Luke's Gospel, where we find this story, gives women a considerable ministry of presence and consolation, a ministry of hope and service, as Mary was certainly offering at the foot of the Cross with the Blessed Mother and Mary Magdalen.

To me it makes perfect sense that Mary and Cleopas would be returning to their home in Emmaus, "conversing about all the things that had occurred" (Luke 24:15) as would any husband and wife. When our Lord appears with them, Cleopas as the man does most of the talking, but when this lonely Traveler appears to be "going on farther" (verse 28), "they urged him, 'Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over'" (verse 29). It sure sounds like a woman's plea, with her husband, to have Him dine in their home as a member of the family. And almost certainly, it is Mary who prepares the meal and bakes the bread that Jesus will break so that they will finally recognize him. It was her bread!

And that's the challenge that I wish to leave with all of us this Easter Season: Where do we seek and meet the risen Lord? Who will help us recognize Christ in our midst when we are too busy or too blind and foolish to see Christ ourselves? After all, we should not be seeking the historical Jesus of Nazareth seen in His day; rather, we should seek the Risen Savior still healing, still consoling in His Mystical Body, Holy Mother Church today.

Do we seek this Risen Savior by reading the Holy Scriptures? Do we find Him waiting, even when we don't recognize or understand Him, in the Sacraments of Confession and Holy Communion? Yes, He's there, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity, whenever the Sacred Bread is broken in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Do we run to Him? Do we beg Him to stay with us? Do we see Him in our brothers and sisters gathered in His name?

Let us pray especially in this Holy Easter Season of Hope that we may never lose sight of our Risen Lord, still journeying with us even when we don't see

him, still with us in all the Sacraments, still with us whenever two or three of us gather in Fraternity in His name.

Christ is risen! Christ is truly risen! Alleluia! Alleluia!

May all the Love, Peace and Joy of this Holy Easter Season be yours!

Tom