

The Mass - an Easter Sacrament

One Day Napoleon was asked by one of his generals 'what was the happiest day of His life'. He wondered if it would be his early triumph over the Italian Army or as a young general of 26 wresting Lombardy from the Austrians. The Emperor looked thoughtful. Ah! he said," the happiest day of my life was the day of my first communion". I was near to God then.

You will notice from the Scriptures that a lot of the sightings of the risen Jesus occurred in the context of a meal and today's Gospel is no exception. There is a clear reference to the Eucharist here. Last Sunday Jesus said to Thomas: "happy are those who have not seen and yet believe". Well, at Mass we don't see Jesus in the flesh but we believe that He is present with us under the appearance of Bread and wine and he speaks to us through the scriptures.

You often hear people say: "I believe in God but I don't believe in the Church". Well, without the Church there is no Mass. It is primarily through the Mass that we come close to our Lord. Why keep Him at a distance if he is our friend? Jesus would have remained more or less a stranger to the Emmaus disciples if they hadn't invited Him in to dine with them that evening. If we neglect the Mass our nearness to the Risen Lord cannot be assumed.

Another important aspect of the gospel today is when Jesus explained the scriptures to the two disciples. That surely refers to the first part of the Mass when we spend time listening to God's word. They said: "did not our hearts burn within us when he talked to us". Do we ever feel the Lord is speaking to us personally through the readings or homily?

The meaning of the word 'mass' is derived from the Latin word '*missa*' which means 'dismissal'. Like the Emmaus disciples we are sent out from the Mass like men and women on a mission.

The disciples, full of joy after seeing Jesus, set out immediately to tell their story of what had happened to them on the road and how they had recognised Him at the breaking of bread.

The body of Jesus was broken on the cross out of love for us.

As bread is broken in the Eucharist, our mission in this world is that our lives will be broken in love for others particularly those whom we're sent to serve. Recognising Jesus in the breaking of bread should also lead us to recognise him in the brokenness of peoples' lives and respond to their needs.

Initially, the two Emmaus disciples are downcast but through their encounter with the Risen Lord their faith is restored. The Mass will build up our faith as well and make us fit for service.

QUESTIONS

- 1. There used to be a time if we missed Mass (on Sunday or holyday) through our own fault we would not go to Holy Communion until we'd been to confession first. People seem to be less concerned about this these days. Discuss*
- 2. Attending Mass brings us closer to Christ. Do you think that the opposite is also true? Discuss*
- 3. What is the best way in your opinion to attract young people back to Mass? Discuss*
- 4. 'I believe in God but not the Church' is often heard these days. How should we, as practicing Catholics, answer people who are of this frame of mind? Discuss*