



# Christian Education

A series of Sermons and Occasional Papers  
From the clergy and members  
of Holy Trinity Church  
Forbes Park, Makati

Date: 10 April 2005  
Title: "Real Presence"  
Comment: *The story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus is not only an episode from the Easter story, but also a parable of the life and witness of the Christian Church.*  
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## Readings for this Sunday:

First Reading	Acts 2: 14a, 36-47
Epistle	1 Peter 1: 17-23
Gospel	Luke 24: 13-35

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Today we have a bit of "Show and Tell." I have brought a picture to show you. It is a painting done by the same artist as did our Stations of the Cross and executed in the same style. It's not automatically clear what it shows until one sees the details. There are two central characters, seated at a table with bread and wine between them and a strange, luminous presence fill the middle of the scene. It is indeed a version of what is described at the end of today's Gospel when Christ is revealed to the two disciples in the Emmaus inn. In this painting are also some interesting details that put this episode in context: there are the empty crosses on Calvary in one corner, a series of open Scripture books in the center, and here to the right the Paschal Candle like the one that burns over there. When I used this picture as an example of the story of Easter at the British School, I asked them to look for the "Secret Jesus." A couple of the pupils finally found Him, here in the light, just at the moment of his vanishing from sight having revealed Himself both in Scripture and the breaking of the bread.

Today's Gospel reading is not only one of the most famous of the Easter stories, it is also the Christian Church's entire story encapsulated in a single chapter. Each part of

the story speaks not only to the experience of the two disciples that Easter Day, but also to the history of the Church ever since.

First, we have two disciples, unnamed but obviously part of those followers who are mentioned in the New Testament, about whom we know very little. They are important enough to have been among the first to hear about the empty tomb, but they haven't waited around to get the rest of the story. They have business, and they are attending to it: leaving the city and heading for the suburbs, distraught, confused and full of questions. They are very much like most of us who have been followers of Jesus, but are still confused and unsatisfied by what we hear.

It is at this point that God finds us, walking down the road of our everyday life. We may not have asked for it, or even expected it. It may come in the subtlest of ways. For the two disciples the man who joined them was a stranger. He asks them what the matter is.

And then this Stranger begins a movable Bible study as they walk: reminding the two disciples about the teaching of their religion and the content of its holy books in reference to the Messiah. Now, most Anglicans and Episcopalians are not particularly good at knowing their Bible.

Even so, the Church trusts that we will be listening when we have Bible readings in our worship. Even now, "...Beginning with Moses and the prophets," Christ in his Church interprets to us "things about himself in all the scriptures." Whatever our attitudes towards Christianity as the final and most perfect expression of God's will for the world, it cannot stand without reference to what went before it: to the witness of the Jewish faith and the words of the Old Testament writings. The early Church knew no other scripture than that Old Testament- nothing else had been written yet- and in them found or sometimes imagined prophecies of a figure quite unlike what the Messiah had been imagined to be. It was the fulfillment of these Scriptures that caused the conversion of many of the earliest Christians who had been raised as Jews and thought as Jews and believed in the Word of God as revealed in Torah and the prophetic books.

And finally in our story, the two disciples, by now fascinated by their traveling companion, ask him to stay with them in the inn, and he consents as far as to share a meal with them there. And it is in the breaking of the bread, something that Jesus must have done many times and which had such a new and special significance on the night before he died, that the Master is revealed for who he really is. It is at that moment that he is no longer visible in the flesh, but begins his new presence with them in a very special way.

Looked at as part of the stories of Easter, this Gospel episode has charm, mystery and excitement. But looked at as the witness of who we are and what we do, it has even more immediate appeal.

Look at what we do every week, we disciples. In the course of our everyday lives, we become aware that Jesus is there with us. He is walking with us, accompanying us in where we are going and what we are doing, concerned with our moods and our needs. He is here in the person of those sitting around us in church: secret, hidden Christs who are with us on our journey.

We come to this place and hear the Scriptures read and interpreted, telling us not only what happened in the past, but also how it relates to us as members of the Body of Christ and what that means for our life. Jesus is present in those words.

Finally, we meet Jesus again in the breaking of the bread: the same, simple act that those two disciples shared in the inn. Remember that the origin of the English word "companion" is a Latin word meaning those who share bread together. This "companionship" was what was the turning point for them. Jesus was recognized by them in what he said and did. They were left with the presence of Jesus in the three ways the Stranger had shown them: 1) the presence of others sharing the journey, 2) the Word of God read and studied, and 3) the Sacrament of Holy Communion. These three things, these three ways, are both a part of today's Gospel story and the

core of the story of the Church today. They are what we still share and what we proclaim to the world.

One of the most significant parts of the media coverage of events in Rome during the last week has been the way in which Church spokesmen have avoided dwelling on the personality cult of John Paul II and instead have reminded the world that his role as bishop in the Christian, not to mention the Roman Church was to bring people to Jesus. And he did this in the same way we are commended to do in today's Gospel: by joining people in their journey, by sharing with them the content and meaning of God's Holy Word, and by proclaiming to them Christ's real presence in the Bread and the Wine of the Holy Eucharist. Simple, and yet also profound, this is the essence of the Church's witness to the Risen Lord, and it is all found there in this story in Luke's version of the Easter account.

The artist who painted this work reminded us of a profound truth: that even if the physical body of Christ might be hard to see in its earthly, limited form, it would remain with his disciples in the sharing of the journey, in the reading of the Scriptures and in the breaking of the bread. If this is a "Hidden Jesus" it is only because we need to be reminded to look for Him where He has promised to be found- in the Bible, in the Sacraments, and in the community of Faith.

The story ends today with these two disciples who had made this great discovery of faith adding their witness to the growing number of those who realized that Jesus wasn't dead anymore, and was in fact more alive than they had ever known: "That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed....'"