

Emmaus Day 2017

Our Gospel, the Emmaus Story, your school name, is an extraordinary story of which I am not sure we all fully comprehend at times. It mirrors what goes on in our modern world in so many ways, but is even much more.

We have two blokes walking along a road, Cleopas and his friend; essentially they were getting away from the disaster and failure of their friend to solve their problems. It was in utter failure and loss that they decided to walk away. They were depressed, where a friend had been killed and all their hopes and dreams were shattered and they didn't know what to do. Even when someone started walking with them they were so overwhelmed with their own problems that they didn't recognise him. Failure, loss, hopes crushed, death of a friend, depression, running out of town, they perhaps were feelings that they had and it overwhelmed them. The beginning of the Emmaus Story is a story of failure and it's pretty confronting when we look at it like this.

It could be a story of ours today, indeed it is, it is a fact of life that we will all experience failure and loss, of something or someone, at some point in our lives. If it's failure of a test, a relationship, work, or personal goal, we will all fail at some point, we will experience loss and failure.

I hope everyone here in this place realises this point, that you will all fail at something or experience failure at some time. You will all walk the road of Emmaus, heads down cast, experiencing loss of some sort, not knowing what to do, not recognising those who walk with you are the face of Christ. Being overwhelmed with all that is happening in your life.

The beginning story of Emmaus is what our society and many people are going through and experiencing in so many ways today. It could be a story and journey of mental health. They could not deal with such loss and tragedy in their lives; they were overwhelmed with it and did not know how to deal with it all. Now for some that is the end of the story. And for some they cannot get out of or deal with the consequences of the loss, failure or what they are experiencing.

Two days ago, I buried a young man of 30: at the prime of his life. I am not sure what was happening for him, but he was overwhelmed with life and all that he was experiencing. He committed suicide. He could not see a way forward. Days like that are the saddest and hardest days I ever experience.

Mental health is a sickness that perhaps those two who walked the road to Emmaus two thousand years ago are the same as we walk today. Experiencing loss, being overwhelmed, failure perhaps, not seeing those around us, they are all symptoms in some way of our mental health and well being. They point to how we are coping with life. The young man I buried could not cope and died a tragic death. He could not see the whole picture as his heart and mind was broken.

There are two parts to this Emmaus story and to all our stories. But I have only told the first half of the story and for some that is all that they can see and experience. This Emmaus journey is so filled with hope and life and sacredness that it is a resurrection story as well. It is a resurrection story for us all amidst whatever we are experiencing or might experience in the future.

As they walked along not being able to see, something within them called them on and forward, their hearts were burning within them. A deep call to relationship and the sacredness of who they were was within them and is within us all.

They did not recognise at first, the person who was walking with them, that it was Christ, because it took time. These experiences all take time. But as they spent time with him, as they shared the journey and listened to him, as he broke bread with them, something changed within them to see beyond the fog and mist of them not being able to see. In our Gospel their hearts burnt with that call forward and they recognised Jesus in the breaking of the bread.

We too, in our times of need, our hearts burn within us and with time we can slowly recognise and see a way forward. With others around us or with that someone we can call on, or that we do not think can solve the problem, but who sits at our table of life and shares the cup of coffee, moment of time, a meal, or simply listens for a while, can change our lives forever. You might be that person who simply sits with another; you may be the person who is the face of Christ for another. We all are, in some way, in either chair, with our hearts burning waiting and wanting, or listening and sharing.

For many people they can only see the first half of the Emmaus journey and it is very real. I am going to say two things to you now and it might seem a little unkind or challenging. First, I hope everyone here experiences loss or failure. And secondly, I hope you can see the other half of YOUR Emmaus story and that you may be a face of Christ for someone struggling, or be a face of hope as you break bread and spend time together. Always know that. Always believe that there is the resurrection and face of Christ who we can be for each other.

Amidst whatever your Emmaus story may look like, know that there is always a second part of the journey; A part that says our burning hearts can be held and made whole again; A part that says that whatever we experience, with time, slowly our hearts will burn once more with the face of Christ within us and around us calling us forward into a new day.

May this, your Emmaus Day, be one of hope for each of you.

May you continue to recognise the faces of Christ in and amongst you and may it be a day of celebration for you all. Amen.

Fr Matthew Moloney