

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER YEAR A (VIRTUAL) HOMILY 2020
MORE DOUBTING THOMASES ALONG THE ROAD TO EMMAUS

Lk 24.13-35 Acts 2.14-23 1Pt 1.17-26 Rhyme Bible for children: "Very Good News"

Welcome once again, to all, in this time of coronavirus, as most of us continue our quieter lives at home, whilst appreciating with great gratitude the efforts of those who continue to serve in medical, service industries and we acknowledge the sacrifice of our police as we mourn the terrible loss of 4 Victorian police officers in the course of their duties, in tragic circumstances.

Michael Leunig has another take on our present situation well in yet another insightful and humorous cartoon, titled: **STAY HOME, STAY SAFE:**

*Fall off a stepladder. Fall down the stairs. Trip on a rug. Trip over the cat. Have a mishap with the carving knife. Get an electric shock from the toaster. Get bitten by spider. Burn yourself with hot oil. Have an accident with a power tool. Crush your fingers in the door. Destroy your mind in front of the screen. Reported your neighbours to the police for being human. Go around the twist. Go up the wall. **STAY HOME GOOD LUCK.***

Life at home can be a bit like that, can't it, without even going out the door? So I guess the moral of the story is **STAY HOME, BE CAREFUL!**

Meanwhile, in Eastertime, we come to Luke's classic or exquisite (*as Jerome Biblical Commentary puts it*) journey story on the road to Emmaus, culminating in a meal, where two totally disillusioned and disheartened former disciples of Jesus have moved in another direction, in a spirit of despair and lost hope. It takes an encounter with a total stranger for them to think again about what has happened, their hearts burning within them, as they listen to the stranger's words of encouragement and faith.

Ultimately, it is they who offer the stranger hospitality, which triggers their recognition. When he pretends to want to move on, but then accepts their invitation to join them for a meal, where they finally recognize him in the breaking of the bread, and then he has vanished. Once more, the transformation has occurred, where they do a U turn and, like the 11 apostles, head back to Jerusalem, that place of danger where the disaster had happened, with the death of Jesus, in whom their hopes had been, but then were dashed.

As Claude Mostowik MSC puts it: *"Their lives seemingly shattered, there was nothing to keep them in Jerusalem, and Emmaus was an escape from life – or so it seems. Their eyes were opened, not when the stranger approaches, or walks with them or tries to explain everything*

to them, but when he takes, blesses, breaks and gives them bread... such an ordinary gesture... but they learn, as we do, that God approaches us through ordinary gestures... in ordinary taking, blessing, breaking and giving... It may be a friend's embrace (don't forget physical, although misnamed social, distancing right now), the laughter of a child at play, walking through a forest, offering food to a person in need, and in sharing a meal with family... Jesus meets us along the road that we take, but... he might also reroute us as he did for the disciples and take us back into the heart of the struggle, into the world of others. We are also reminded that whenever goodness is shared, tears dried, comfort given, charity done, he is present. We are all on a journey. Our paths are uneven. Losses at times are heavy... But we are not alone... One question about the present pandemic (if we turn too much in on ourselves and our worries)... is how it can blind us to our neighbours, strangers, the poor and refugees. Whatever religion we hold onto fails us if it does not promote a great sense of the other and appreciation for the other and for creation."

And so, from sadness, foolishness, and slowness of heart, they move to joy, insight and recommitment to the path of following Jesus, as they resume their lives as faithful disciples, returning to join the others. As scripture scholar Raymond Brown says of Jesus' reading and explanation of the scriptures to them, and then the breaking of the bread scenario, that it ***"may well have been at the root of Christian belief in the presence of the risen Lord in the eucharistic banquet"***, which we continue celebrate (albeit virtually) right now, in Word and Sacrament. We hear the same format and ritual in the gatherings of the early Christian communities in Luke's ongoing account in Acts of the Apostles. So here we are today, celebrating his presence among us, in much the same way, with our need to respond in faith as we continue our journeys along the path of life.

It's also Anzac Day this weekend, and the myths continue to abound that, in some strange way, the Gallipoli and World War I experience forged our identity as a nation. Rather, I'd see the commemoration as a time to remember the good will, service, suffering and sacrifices made by so many, in all conflicts we have been caught up in, but also to remember the horrors of war, any war, and its long term aftermath of emotional trauma, psychological damage, and negative tsunami effects on families and relationships and stability of life ongoing for those who returned. It could well be argued that World War I was no ***'Great'*** War, but an unmitigated disaster for those involved, achieving very little beyond the carnage and effectively the loss of a significant proportion of a young generation of men, whose lives were cut short or permanently damaged. At least, in a different way, World War II, largely precipitated by the aftermath of the former, was more the ***'just war'***, in order to counter the dark evils of Nazism, Fascism, Nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism. For the future, let's hope our dedicated servicemen and women can be deployed more for purposes of peacekeeping, than battle, in an unfortunately divided, but small world.

To quote Private Baldrick, in ***Blackadder V***, as they prepare to go over the top from the trenches to almost certain death by machinegun fire: ***"Here the words I sing, War's a horrid thing. So***

I sing, sing, sing... ding-a-ling-a-ling.” We pray for peace at home, in our communities, our country and our world. And, of course, *“Peace be with you”* are the first words of the Risen Lord to his friends, and so to you and me.

Further poignant accounts and reflections on the horrors and trauma of war are recounted in “I Was Only Nineteen” (John Schumann & Craig Smith), “Anzac Day Parade” (Glenda Kane & Lisa Allen) and “And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda” (Eric Bogle & Bruce Whatley), the last of which is recorded for reflection, following the end of this weekend’s Mass.

john hannon

26th April 2020