

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

In the Gospel today, we hear that beautiful story of the disciples' encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Emmaus. We find in this encounter an encounter with Jesus at the **Mass**. The story is broken up into the same parts of the Mass: the **Introductory Rites**, the **Liturgy of the Word**, the **Liturgy of the Eucharist**, and the **Concluding Rites**. Let's take some time to examine how we celebrate Mass; maybe there are areas where we need to enter more fully into this gift.

The two disciples first encounter Jesus on the road. He walks with them on their journey, starting where they are, but calling them deeper into union with Him. Like the disciples, we don't always recognize Jesus walking with us (cf. Luke 24:16), but He truly wants to reveal Himself to us. The fact that the disciples look "downcast" (vs. 17) points to how we are in our sin. The Penitential Act calls us to recognize how far we are from God and ask Him to wash us clean ("Lord, have mercy"). Do we take the time and make the effort before Mass and at the beginning of Mass to examine how we have hurt God, others and ourselves? Do we repent of (turn away from) our sins and ask for forgiveness during this part of the Mass? It is a great opportunity to receive God's healing mercy and love.

Jesus proceeds to open the Scriptures to the disciples (vs. 27). Later, they recall how their hearts were burning within them (vs. 32). Every time we read the Scriptures, every time we hear the Scriptures proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word, it is an encounter with the Risen Christ. He pours out His Holy Spirit upon us that His Word may speak to our hearts. The Word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12). God has a word of life for us each day. Do we listen with expectation to hear His Word? Do we really expect Him to speak to us? Do we want to hear what He has to say? This is the point of the **Mass Journal**: we ask the Holy Spirit to open our hearts to the Word *God already is speaking to us*. The Journal helps us to remember to ask for and listen to that Word. God truly wants to set our hearts on fire for love of Him!

After opening the Scriptures, Jesus (after being invited to stay with them) then gives them the Eucharist. Throughout the Gospels, as well as in St. Paul's letters, whenever the Eucharist is referenced four words are used: **took, blessed, broke, gave** (vs. 30). Jesus gives the disciples the Eucharist and then "**vanishes from their sight**" (vs. 31). Why does He vanish, especially after the disciples have so earnestly begged Him to stay with them (vs. 29)? Because He is now present in the Eucharist, and when they receive, present *in* them! *He is present in as real a way in the Eucharist as He was moments before standing in front of them!* When we come to receive our Lord in the Eucharist, do we recognize His Presence before us, and then *in us* when we receive? It is *truly God!* Do we come to Him with humility? Do we receive Him with awe? Do we *allow Him to stay with us*? Jesus makes us **TABERNACLES** of His Presence. He will *stay with us* as long as we desire Him to stay with us. Some of us don't recognize His Presence at all, and so He doesn't remain with us at all. Some of us recognize His Presence, but as soon as Mass is over (or before that if the musicians hit a wrong note or Fr. Von goes on a bit too long with the announcements) we "shove Him" from our minds, and allow anger or other things to be present to us. Sometimes we unconsciously tell Jesus to "take a hike" when we are fighting to get out of the parking lot after Mass. How long do you allow Jesus to remain present in you? Something we *all* need to ponder and work on, for Jesus longs to remain with us always!

Immediately after receiving the Eucharist, the disciples realize that they are now sent – they "set out at once" (vs. 33) and return to Jerusalem where they speak about their encounter with the Risen Christ. It's interesting to note how throughout the Mass we build up and build up to the climax of receiving Communion, and then a couple minutes later, we're filing out of Church – in fact, we are told to "**GO!**". The Concluding Rites are purposely short, for now we have been equipped with the encounter with Christ – in the Word and in the Eucharist – to "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord" or "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." We are sent! Attending Mass is not like watching a movie – we are not silent spectators, waiting to be entertained. No, in the Mass, we are active receivers with the intention of becoming Christ – yes, *becoming Christ* – for the world, as we go forth from here.

I encourage you to take some time this week to ponder how you participate in Mass. What are your expectations? Are they high enough? Do you really expect to encounter God and His live changing Presence? Are you ready to receive *all you need* to go forth and be Christ for the world?