

The Risen Lord is Traveling with Us (3rd Sunday of Easter Cycle A)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings of Peace from the risen Lord Jesus!

We are living in the Easter Season, but we are also living in uncertain times. We are all trying to live life in a "new normal" reality - from strict observance of personal hygiene to the critical practice of social distancing. And we are also trying to thrive in dealing with the threat and unprecedented effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Of course, when welcoming and embracing this "new normal," it is undeniable that there are difficulties in adjustments, there are tough decisions to do, and there are plans to be carefully thought through as we move forward. It is encouraging and comforting to know that there are individuals, groups, and organizations who are convinced that we will survive and overcome this deadly pandemic when we unite and work together. This is good news, but we need to fervently pray and beg the grace of God to bless and sustain our good deeds because it could easily whine down after the pandemic.

Given this "new normal" living, we are challenged to recognize the Risen Christ, who shows himself to us and accompanies us in our daily lives. We all know that Jesus' presence is not dependent on our feelings nor our present circumstances. He is present because he has risen; he is victorious over death and sin. He is not just a story in the past that we remember; he is alive and is with us quietly but profoundly shows us the path of life (cf. Ps. 16:11).

Let us find inspiration and comfort from the scripture readings, especially the story in the gospel this Sunday. It is the story of the encounter of the two disciples as they journey to Emmaus. It is an appropriate story as we navigate through our challenging times.

We learned that the two disciples decided to leave Jerusalem. They were disappointed because Jesus, whom they thought will be their savior, died. They struggled to make sense of his suffering and death, and so their walk towards Emmaus was a walk of discouragement. The risen Lord appeared to them, whom they recognized as a stranger, and joined their travel. He engaged in conversation with them, asking questions about their circumstance, and allowed them to ventilate their sad story and disappointments. But he gradually directed them to the bigger story, that is, recalling with them the promise of Sacred Scripture, what the prophets foretold about the Messiah, and helping them to see the meaning of the event. Their sad story had become a conversation of life and faith.

At every step of their troubled journey, Jesus was in their midst, but they did not recognize his presence until the breaking of bread. The breaking of bread was the highpoint of their journey. They now notice how their hearts were burning, their faith was restored, and they returned to Jerusalem with new-found enthusiasm.

What does this tell us?

First, Jesus is present with us in all our travels of life. Jesus is present because he has risen. We are taught through the Sacred Scriptures that he passes through the close door and appears whenever he wills. He is present because he is the Lord of creation. He is present because it is his promise. So, we are confident that wherever we are and wherever we go, he is present with us. This is a fundamental assertion of our faith.

Second, whenever we engaged in questioning our present sad state, whenever we start to wonder how we are going to survive and thrive amid challenges, and bring this questioning in prayers, the good news is, the risen Lord is actively present in those questioning. There are lessons that the Lord wants us to know, reflect, and understand. They are the lessons we learned when we spend a quiet time in pondering. He also communicates

with us through people, for "whenever there are two or three gathered in my name, I am there in their midst" (Mat. 18:20). He speaks through the gathered community, even though our community here at CCST has temporarily become and reduced to a virtual worshipping community.

Third, he reveals his presence whenever the Sacred Scriptures are proclaimed. He speaks to us through the Word we heard and read. It is through the Sacred Scriptures that we know him, and it is our constant invitation to listen to him through reading and praying with the Bible.

Finally, we are made to realize that the Eucharist is the high point of our encounter with the Lord. He communicates not only his message, his words, but he also shares his whole life, that is, his full divinity and humanity through His Body and Blood, a spotless and unblemished lamb (cf. 1 Pt. 1:19). That he is not just beside us, nor in front of us, nor at the back of us, when we received him, he is inside of us, better still lives in us. Our spiritual communion prayer keeps us in union with him and keeps our heart longing to received him sacramentally.

Yes, we are living in uncertain times, living in a "new normal." But we, as a Church, though reduced to a virtual worshipping community, are living in the risen Lord, and in some mysterious way, we are wirelessly fed. We can be confident that if we deliberately and willingly open our hearts to be burned by the love of the risen Lord, we encounter him. If we open our minds to be influenced by his presence through persistent prayers, reading the sacred scriptures, we meet the risen Lord. If we are actively engaging in dialogue with the "virtual" faith community, and creatively and reaching out and helping others in need, we encounter the risen Lord.

I am sharing with you resources for praying together for your family. They are At-Home Prayers for Times of Healing, Illness, and Death, free download resources from Liturgical Press. Please see them on a separate page.

Let us pray and ask for the grace to have our eyes open, to have our hearts soften, to have our whole being to be trusting in the risen Lord so that we can see beyond our present circumstances to the joy that is all around us and ahead of us and truly live the gift of the Risen life of Christ. Alleluia!