

HOMILY – OUR LADY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS PARISH PEARCE ACT

Very Rev Peter G. Williams AM VG SChLJ

In 2010 a film was released written, produced and directed by Emilio Estevez called “The Way.” It starred Martin Sheen as the principal character who walks the Medieval pilgrim route the *Camino de Santiago* which in recent decades has become enormously popular for many travelers to Europe. In this story Sheen plays Thomas Avery, an American academic whose estranged son Daniel died in the Pyrenees as a result of a storm.

Whilst his original intent was simply to collect his son’s body, he decides to honour him by taking the route his son was going to embark on as a tribute to him. Whilst walking he encounters others, who are all looking for meaning in their lives – a rather unique cross-section of humanity; a man trying to lose weight, a woman who has been subject of domestic violence, a young Irishman who aspires to be a writer and seems to have an impenetrable block, and even an elderly priest from New York.

Whilst none of them (well except for the priest) have any overt religious reasons for embarking on the Camino they nevertheless find a connection to one another and even Tom begins to open up to his fellow pilgrims. Upon arriving in Santiago Tom realizes that he has resolved the questions that he had about his son, and his fractious relationship with him. This was due in large measure because of the interactions he has made with his fellow pilgrims, who had all opened up their lives and as a result everyone gained new insights. He is able now to dispose of his ashes and move ahead in his own life.

The “road trip” genre of film is a time honoured template in Hollywood to explore how men and women deal with transitional times in their lives, often brought on by some tragedy or personal crisis.

And that is precisely the genius of the Gospel narrative today which Luke, the master story teller in the New Testament relates in the story of the road to Emmaus. Emmaus at the time of Jesus was a small village about 11 kilometres from Jerusalem. We are introduced to Cleopas and his friend who had been followers of Jesus – not member of the inner band of disciples, but nevertheless had been inspired enough by what Jesus had said and done to see themselves identified with his group.

Many years ago the late Cardinal Carlo Martini the Jesuit Archbishop of Milan and a noted Biblical scholar was invited to Melbourne to give a number of presentations. One was on this very gospel passage, and a question came from the audience as to whether he thought that the other person with Cleopas might have been a woman. Cardinal Martini paused and then said: “I very much doubt that, because nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus ever call a woman foolish!”

Now these two despondent and disappointed are going away, abandoning the one they believed as they told the stranger who joined would be the deliverance of Israel. As with us when we are disappointed and despondent when projects, relationships and other aspects of life don’t work out they had turned inward and become so consumed with their own pre-occupations they failed to recognize the one

walking with them. Jesus seizes the opportunity to explain to them when they seem incredulous at his ignorance of what had transpired with the recent events in Jerusalem. Jesus broke open the scriptures.

We might ponder what scriptures Jesus referred to in his discussion. Perhaps he spoke of the ways in which God consistently has brought life out of death. Maybe he mentioned the story of Abraham and Sarah and how against all odds Sarah in old age gives birth to Isaac. Or the story of the Exodus and how the People of Israel were delivered from slavery in Egypt and set free from bondage. Or did he make reference to the mysterious “suffering servant” in Isaiah as apparently defeated but triumphant in his vocation to restore Israel. These and other stories of God bringing life out of death show common patterns. In every case God acted unexpectedly and unimaginably.

This discussion brought about a complete change in mood and their spirits were raised as they later reflected. “Did our hearts not burn within us...” Pressing him to stay with them it is when he “breaks the bread” that they recognize him finally. The guest they had invited to their table became their host. Jesus wasn’t just given them bread, he was given them back themselves. This was their restoration. When Jesus broke the bread something in them broke open. With the breaking open, their lives they were being put back together.

So, it is often for ourselves, despite our own brokenness it is not an ending. It is breaking open into a new life, to new seeing, to new recognition, to community, welcome, hospitality and love. Isn’t that why we gather around the table every Sunday?

The community to whom Luke wrote were already engaged in the weekly ‘breaking of the bread’ and we see in this resurrection account the pattern that has formed what we are also doing at this very hour – being exposed to the Word of God and following the command of Christ to do this “in memory of me.”

That is why we hear Peter in the first reading speaking out with such clarity and forthrightness – full of confidence and as he said at the conclusion of the passage assigned for today’s Mass “...what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit.” Peter is reprised in the second reading from his first Letter where again he stresses the resurrection as the source of life for those who believe in Jesus. “Through him you now have faith in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory for that very reason – so that you would have faith and hope in God.”

Here we find ourselves on this the third Sunday of Easter seeking to experience once again the joy of the resurrection which we celebrated only two weeks ago. We long to be transformed by our participation in the Eucharist and to experience through the “breaking of the bread” that same joy and surprise those two followers of Jesus experience at the table in Emmaus. But just with those two, it requires that we are transparent before the Lord because it is only when we open our hearts as they did, that he can enter and begin that process of bringing us out of the darkness of lives into the light of the new life promised to all who have received the grace of baptism.