

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place an open bible, lighted candle, flower, and small loaf of bread at the center of your group.

LEADER: Let's take a walk in the world.

ALL: And find where earth is awakening.

LEADER: Let's remember what we see. *Take turns telling where you see spring.*

LEADER: Help us Risen One find you in the sharing of our lives. *Sing an alleluia you know.*

Easter is a spring event. Spring is its own liturgy. Earth awakens. Flowers poke stems above ground toward the warmth of sun. Creation testifies to God's sustaining presence. Creation growing makes God visible just as Jesus makes visible who God is and reveals love is God's life-giving power.

The walk to Emmaus in Sunday's gospel becomes a liturgy on foot for two of Jesus' disciples. They talk about the scriptures (liturgy of the word) and break bread together with a stranger (liturgy of the eucharist).

As they tell how Jesus took hold of their hearts and hopes, the two get excited all over again about who Jesus is. Conversation with the stranger stirs the embers of their faith into flame. Breaking bread together reveals the stranger is Jesus with them.

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

LIVE EASTER

Breathe deep. Feel your heart pump. Say thank you for life. Help serve meals at a homeless shelter. Read to a child. Have dinner with your closest friend. Read to an old person. Find a tulip. Eat lunch with others at work. Rise each day to bless God for sunlight. Learn the name of someone you often see but don't know. Entertain friends you haven't seen this year. Have lunch with someone half your age. Email a college roommate or armed service buddy. Call a sibling. Go fishing. Plant a vegetable or flower.

So many times conversation over dinner repeats the liturgy of friendship. Talking together stirs the embers of old understandings and bursts new insights into flame. The shared meal sends us forth humming, feeling understood and understanding, in communion.

● With whom have you talked and eaten lately?



GOSPEL

Jesus' disciples know him in breaking bread.



NARRATOR: On the first day of the week, two disciples were going their way to a village named Emmaus seven miles distant from Jerusalem. They were talking to one another about all that had happened. As they were talking and discussing, Jesus came near and began to travel with them. But they did not recognize him.

STRANGER: What are you discussing as you walk along so sadly?

CLEOPAS: Are you a stranger in Jerusalem that you do not know the things that happened these past few days?

STRANGER: What things?

CLEOPAS: The things to do with Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet powerful in word and deed in the eyes of God and all the people; how our chief priests and leaders delivered him up to be condemned to death and crucified him. We were hoping that he was the one who would set Israel free.

DISCIPLE: Besides all this, today, the third day since these things happened, some women of our group astonished us. After going to the tomb before dawn and not finding his body, they came back saying they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of those with us went to the tomb and found it empty just as the women said, but him they did not see.

STRANGER: How slow of heart you are to believe all the prophets have said. Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things to enter into his glory?

NARRATOR: Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted for them every passage of scripture that referred to him. As they neared the village to which they were going, the stranger acted as if he were going farther. But they pressed him.

DISCIPLES: Stay with us, for it is nearly evening. The day is ending.

NARRATOR: So he went to stay with them. While he sat with them, he took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. Their eyes were opened and they recognized him but he vanished from their sight. They said to each other—

DISCIPLES: Were not our hearts burning inside us as he talked to us on the road and opened the scriptures to us?

NARRATOR: They got up immediately and returned to Jerusalem, where they found the eleven and the rest of the company assembled.

COMPANY: The Lord has been raised! It is true! He has appeared to Simon.

NARRATOR: Then the two recounted what had happened on the road and how they knew him in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24.13-35

How is Jesus really present with us?

The two disciples who leave Jerusalem and head home to Emmaus in Sunday's gospel have experienced a terrible loss. As disciples, they wrapped their lives around Jesus, whom they expected would usher in the reign of God. Their hopes die at his crucifixion. The two disciples are walking away from

not only the fact of Jesus' death but also from disturbing reports that he has been raised up.

The mystery of God's ways escapes the two, even though earlier Jesus told his disciples that in Jerusalem he would suffer, die, and be raised up. The disciples' expectation that their journey with Jesus will end in earthly triumph blinds them

to the presence of God in the unprecedented and bewildering events unfolding around them. They handle their confusion by retreating to a comfortable place they once came from.

Emmaus lies seven miles from Jerusalem, a walk long enough for a transforming conversation. The walk represents a whole process of

moving from loss to new life, from blindness to faith.

● When have you experienced your hopes die?

● Who has helped rekindle your lost hopes?

Luke draws on Second Isaiah, the prophet of Israel's exile in Babylon, to express the meaning of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. The prophet speaks in Isaiah 40-55. He writes four songs that describe the people collectively as God's suffering servant, who bears "the punishment that makes us whole, and by whose wounds we were healed" (53.5).

In their return from exile the people become a revelation of God's faithfulness. "It is too little for you to be my servants," Second Isaiah says on God's behalf, "I will make you a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth" (49.59-60). The people discover God remembers them, can act in this foreign land, and acts through the foreign leader, Cyrus of Persia, to return them home.

These are passages that suggest the messiah had to suffer death to enter his glory, but on Monday after Jesus' resurrection the two disciples don't have this insight yet. During 50 years of telling Jesus' story orally, the early Christian communities develop these insights that the written gospels proclaim.

"Stay with us, for it is nearly evening."

In Luke's gospel neither Mary Magdalene nor any of the women who find the tomb empty remember the worrisome words Jesus spoke earlier until the two men awaken their memories. "Remember how he told you while he was still in Galilee that the Son of Man would be handed over to sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again" (24.6-7). Then they remember.

"Didn't the messiah have to suffer to enter into his glory?" the stranger asks. Yes, answers Luke's gospel. Luke echoes Jesus' passion predictions in the words of the stranger and the words of the angels to the women. This opens the scriptures in a new way and rekindles the disciples' hopes.



● When have your expectations blinded you to the presence of God at work in your life?

● With what contradictions do you wrestle in reflecting on Jesus' death and resurrection?

In the Emmaus story the risen Jesus becomes present to the two disciples first through interpreting the scriptures together and then through breaking bread, the same ways Jesus becomes present in every Eucharist. In extending hospitality to the stranger, the disciples welcome a guest for supper who turns out to be their host at the last supper and whom the reader recognizes as the host of every Eucharist.

Their hospitality toward a stranger rewards the two disciples, but as soon as they recognize Jesus, he vanishes. Their recognition is the seeing of faith. They begin to piece together a new vision.

They remember how their hearts burned within them as the stranger explained the scriptures and revived their hopes. And they met Jesus in the breaking of the bread because they wanted to hear more and invited him to dinner, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening."

● What role is most transforming in your experience—guest or host?

● Who do you urge to stay in your life?

● What makes your heart burn with hope in all the human race can become?

Death can't hold Jesus.

Sunday's first reading comes from the sermon Peter gives on Pentecost. This sermon proclaims the same core message as Sunday's gospel does: God has raised up Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. We hear the Christian creed forming in these passages.

The Easter event calls forth the Pentecost experience, in which people from many parts of the world receive the Spirit of Christ. The authentic Christian church must be as catholic—as diverse, whole, and universal—as the love Jesus Christ reveals through his life and teaching and through his sending of the Holy Spirit.

When we gather to remember Jesus' death and resurrection and break bread as he asked, we celebrate and nourish our commitment to Jesus' universal mission. Each Eucharist challenges us to embrace the world as the love of Christ embraces the world.

Peter begins preaching.

On the day of Pentecost Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice, and addressed them: "You who are Jews, indeed all of you staying in Jerusalem! Listen to what I have to say:

"People of Israel, listen to me! Jesus the Nazorean was a man whom God sent to you with miracles, wonders, and signs as his credentials. These God worked through him in your midst, as you well know. He was delivered up by

the set purpose and plan of God; you even used pagans to crucify and kill him. God freed him from death's bitter pangs, however, and raised him up again, for it was impossible that death should keep its hold on him.

"David says of him:

'I have set the Lord before me; with God at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. My heart has been glad and my tongue rejoiced, my body will live on in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to the nether world, nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption. You have shown me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.'

"Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Since he was a prophet, he knew that God has sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, 'He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.'

"This Jesus God raised up, and of that, all of us are witnesses. Being, therefore, exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear."

Acts 2.14,22-33

- How is the Spirit of God working through the Body of Christ in your midst?
- What challenges to be more catholic in your faith are you experiencing?

PRAY

LEADER: It is through Jesus Christ we are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory.

ALL: Stay with us, Lord.

LEADER: We have broken the bread of Jesus' word and nourished each other with our reflection.

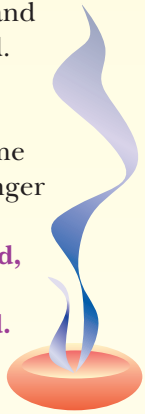
ALL: Our hearts burn within us.

LEADER: Let us break and share this loaf of bread. As we share pieces of the loaf, let us make a commitment to welcome someone who is a stranger to us into our lives.

ALL: We hear your word, Risen Lord. We are your body in our world.

Easter in us. Amen.

Alleluia.



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