Reflection for the 3rd Sunday of Easter 2023

“It was in the breaking of the bread”

1st Reading: Acts 2:14, 22-33
Responsorial Psalm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11
2nd Reading: 1 Peter 1:17-21

Many years ago when I lived in Lima, Peru, in Parroquia San Norberto, I listened to one of the Norbertine priests who was pastor of the parish give a homily directed to the children receiving their first communion. He helped them understand that often we recognize who a person is by the actions we see him or her take. Then he demonstrated by miming a free throw, and the children all guessed that that was a basketball player. He did a little soccer kick and they knew right away he was a futbol player. So, he at last showed them that the disciples who had met Jesus on their way home from Jerusalem to Emmaus finally recognized him when he took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them.

With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight.

I loved that homily, and since we had a great number of children in our parish for first communion, I got to hear it five or six times! Afterward, I wrote a haiku which I’ve kind of “prayed” for years since then.

Emmaus people
Look for him but fail to see
Until the breaking!

Of course those travelers who had seen Christ crucified didn’t recognize him because now he had a different appearance – he had a resurrected appearance. And the gospel says that they recognized him in the breaking of the bread.

But, my haiku-prayer also speaks of the breaking in a larger sense. We are the Emmaus people in the haiku, and we do indeed look for Jesus, but we don’t recognize him easily. We do not see him until we – or someone we have come to care about – are broken.

Being broken is a normal part of life – We can be broken by a terrible loss, or a disappointment. We can be broken by a serious health issue or a car accident. We can be broken by a betrayal – our own or someone’s betrayal of us. Brokenness can come in our failure to live up to what we have promised, in a realization of sinfulness. Parents experience brokenness when one of their children suffers or breaks their heart with their awful choices.

Sometimes it does indeed take being broken for us to recognize our need for Jesus, to see him as the only answer. Sometimes life breaks us without our consent or any thought of imitating Christ. But, eventually – and for me, sometimes it has taken years – we finally “see” that God has been walking with us all the while. Sometimes we are broken for others, and we realize that this is exactly what Jesus meant when he said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Do what I am doing – give your life, your love, your heart for others.

May we Emmaus people remember, as those two disciples did, how our hearts burned within us when we heard the scriptures broken open for us by life and by faith in the resurrected Jesus. And may our actions – reaching out to others; forgiving; loving one another; welcoming the stranger, the outcast, the different one - reveal to others that we are his followers.

Sister Eileen White, April 2023

Featured image courtesy of Kate Remmer/Unsplash