

## **Reflection for The Third Sunday of Easter**

**April 26, 2020**

**Carol J. Dempsey, OP, Ph.D.**

As I write these reflections from my place of “home” with all of you in your homes on this lovely Sunday in Eastertime, I think about how the events of the world have surely changed our lives in ways we have yet to realize. In the midst of this season of new life, we pause to remember those who continue to sacrifice their lives on the frontlines, caring for others in so many ways, and we pause to remember those who have passed on and the sorrow that fills so many hearts. And yet, today’s readings remind us that death is not the end of life, that life continues on in the Divine One to whom the Christ bears witness in a new glorified life form—the Divine One with whom we will one day be fully united. For now, we have to remember and focus on the fact that we draw our life, we draw our power from the Divine, we who embody the Divine just as the Christ does. One of the themes in today’s readings is Power.

In the first two readings from Acts and First Peter, we learn that Christ’s power was rooted in and flowed from God’s power. This power enabled Christ to teach, preach, heal, forgive sins, reach out to touch, embrace, and love fully those who were on the margins. This power enlarged the heart of Christ, enabling this heart to welcome everyone, friend and foe alike. This power enabled him to become a prophet of God. This Christ was a prophet of God not only by the deeds done by embodying the presence of the Divine so fully in life. And it is the power of the Divine, the power of God that raised the Christ to new life. All of this was done so that our faith and hope would rest in God. Clearly, these first two readings focus on God, God’s love, and God’s presence and power within human life. In Catholicism today, much energy is now spent

on evangelization---“the new evangelization” in the words of past Popes John Paul II and Benedict and now supported and promoted by Pope Francis and many of the church’s patriarchal and hierarchical leadership today. The focus of the “new evangelization” has been on bringing people to belief in Jesus as presented in the Gospels. Oftentimes, this emphasis on the Jesus of the Gospels has historicized the Gospels as if the portrait we receive in the Gospels is really who Jesus was. But when we read the Gospels closely, Jesus is forever pointing away from himself and pointing to the power of God which enables him to do what he does. The Gospels are good news stories. They give us a picture of the power of God working through Christ in the created world. And so, as Christians, as Catholics, whom do we preach? Do we preach Christ or do we preach about the power of God working in our world? Do we focus on the earthly Jesus, or do we focus on the glorified Christ who is one with the Divine? Do we understand ourselves as the embodiment of the Divine, or do we continually look outside of ourselves when the Christ, the Divine is in our midst—within us and all around us—working through us to love, to heal, to bear with, to celebrate with, to grieve with, and to dream with? Christ bore witness to the experience of and the encounter with God. Is not God the one we should be evangelizing people to? But then again, how can we evangelize others if we are not first evangelized ourselves? Who do we say God is? And is our understanding of God based on what we have learned or what we experience and have encountered? Easter is about experience and encounter. This point brings me to the Gospel for today.

The story about the journey to Emmaus is one of my favorite stories. It is a story about encounters. The couple on the road, Cleopas and his spouse, are walking along together and talking about all the things that had happened to Jesus in their recent past days. Suddenly, they are encountered by a stranger on the road who walks *with them*, and who asks a simple question.

Baffled by the stranger's seeming ignorance of past events, the two travelers tell the person on the road *with them* about the story of what had happened to Jesus the Nazarene. To their surprise, the stranger then confronts them and proceeds to interpret the Scriptures for them and later even dines with them at table at which time their eyes are opened. They recognize the Christ in the breaking of the bread together. Then the Christ vanishes, and they are left with wonder, joy, and excitement: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the Scriptures to us?" These two people had an *experience* of the Christ, of the Divine, and NOW they truly had a story to tell.

What is significant in the Gospel is that Christ walks *with them* on the road. They do not walk behind him; he does not walk in front of him. They are NOT disciples; they are apostles. Discipleship fades after Easter, and fades even more fully with the arrival of Pentecost, the next big feast we celebrate. The encounter with the Divine gives them a story to tell and makes them apostles in the best sense of the word. They join the eleven who have also had an encounter with the Christ, with the Divine, especially Simon. The question for us then is this: Will we remain "disciples" all our lives or will we become "apostles"? And if we desire to be apostles, then what is the story we have to tell about our encounter with the Divine on our journey through life? Is our understanding of God—of the Divine—based on what we have been taught? Based on what we read in books and in the Bible? Or is our encounter with the Divine experienced in everything that enters into our lives including the presence of the Divine who already dwells within us? Only when we are aware of and receptive to the Divine in our lives and in the world around us will we have a story to tell, and only when we allow ourselves to be encountered by the Divine whose spirit dwells in all life will we have our eyes opened to the Scriptures called life. And then we will have a story to tell as we become fully the Christ on the road, who walks *with All* in all.

Only then will we fully embody the mystery of Easter as we bear witness to the resurrection of Christ not in words but through our lives, always blessed but ready to be broken.