

HOMILY OF H.E. SALVATORE PENNACCHIO
VIJAYAPURAM

Stay with us o Lord!

This is the heartfelt plea that the disciples of Emmaus have addressed to the Lord, when they recognized him as Jesus and Lord at the breaking of the bread. Today, we have gathered around the altar of Christ, in this magnificent and historical Cathedral, founded by Bishop Ambrose Abasolo, OCD, with your Pastor, Most Rev. Sebastian Thekethecheril, whom I greet fraternally. I likewise greet the priests, the religious men and women, you, dear faithful, and the People of God in Vijayapuram.

We wish to thank the Lord together for his real presence among us in the Eucharist on this day in which we celebrate 50 years of the construction of this Cathedral.

In a figurative sense, this Cathedral can resemble the “road” the disciples of Emmaus were walking; in fact, in this sacred place, built through the sacrifice of the Carmelite missionaries and the faithful of that time to worship the Lord, many people have done their “journey” to know and meet Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life.

This sacred place has become the witness and symbol of the faith of this Diocese, of this region; many events took place in this Cathedral. Various Bishops sat on its chair; many priests have served this church; legions of faithful received here their initiation to the Christian Faith.

Today, all of you together – the Bishop, the clergy, the religious and the faithful – in giving thanks to God, commit yourselves to continue to take ahead the flame of the faith which has been transmitted to you by those who preceded you.

As Peter exhorted the first baptized of the Christian communities, you must be always aware that you are *living stones* of this beautiful construction, to irradiate with your life the faith in the Lord. From his part, the Lord, just like to the disciples who were “sad”, doubtful and fearful, assures you that He walks with you, that He is a companion in your journey to encourage you, support you, strengthen you in the faith and animate you with zeal and joy. The Lord does not want sad Christians, but responsible, zealous, courageous and joyful people.

Let us have a look now at the Word of God of this III Sunday of Easter, in order to obtain some spiritual nourishment for our souls; in particular let us put ourselves in the shoes of the two disciples mentioned in the Gospel passage –

one of them is named Cleopas – who are traveling along with the Lord to the village of Emmaus.

1. Firstly, let us read again the Gospel: “*Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side*”. In the attitude of the two disciples we can see a deep desire for searching the truth, but as Jesus rebukes them later, they were “*foolish men! So slow to believe...*”. Their idea was that the Messiah was a liberator; they hoped “*that he would be the one to set Israel free*”. They had not understood Jesus’ mission, sent by the Father to redeem the whole of humanity through the sacrifice on the Cross. They had remained cold on hearing about the women who ran early morning to the tomb, and they almost took them for visionaries: “*They came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive*”. They also remained sad and doubtful about the version given by the Apostles Peter and John: “*Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing*”.

The difficulties, the doubts and sadness, the slowness to understand of the two disciples of Emmaus are sometimes also ours, when we refuse to recognize the Lord, and we put obstacles to his presence in our life, when following the roads of selfishness, sin and pride, something “prevents us from recognizing the Lord”. Then we become sad; darkness and doubts attack us because we have put off the light of Christ. However, in spite of our weaknesses the Lord is there, He walks with us in silence all the same, though we have put him aside.

2. If instead, like the disciples of Emmaus, we show our desire to encounter the Lord in our life, and in sincerity of heart we want to discover the truth, then the Lord comes to our help to open our eyes to faith and to light.

Here is the second point for our reflection: the Lord as good catechist explains the Scriptures, teaches us to recognize him by two means we have at our disposal every day: a) the **meditation of the Word of God**, of the Scriptures, and b) the **Eucharist**, the Holy Mass, the Body and Blood of Jesus.

St. Jerome wrote that “ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ”. As the Evangelist Luke describes it, Jesus “*starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself*”. From Jerusalem to the village of Emmaus, it is 11 km of distance, and about three hours walk; on the way Jesus gives the disciples a short course of catechesis and they begin to understand the true mission of Jesus, the Redeemer, so much so that when they reached Emmaus they asked him to stay with them: “*It is nearly evening and the day is almost over*”.

The encounter with Jesus becomes more personal at the moment of breaking the bread, when Jesus says the blessing and hands over the bread to them, recalling the gestures of the last Supper when he instituted the Eucharist.

Faith, says Pope Francis, is not a doctrine; it is the personal encounter with Jesus. An encounter enriched with the teachings of the Fathers, the study and meditation of the Word of God, the nourishment with the Body and Blood of the Lord.

The Holy Mass is a dual banquet: in the first part, the breaking of the Word of God, and in the second part the consecration and taking part in the Body and Blood of Christ. But it is one banquet, where we dialogue, we talk and meet personally with Jesus, our Saviour.

3. From the Eucharist, from the joy of having met the Lord, comes the duty and the wish to proclaim the Risen Jesus. Just like the disciples of Emmaus, who, filled with joy for having met the Lord in the breaking of bread, “*set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem*”, to “*tell the story of what had happened on the road*” and proclaimed “*Yes it is true. The Lord has risen*”.

With these sentiments of joy and gratitude to the Lord, after hearing the Word of God, let us prepare ourselves to welcome Christ in the Eucharist, so that we may take him to all we meet, like Mary, “the living tabernacle of the Lord”, to whose Immaculate Heart this Cathedral is dedicated, with faithfulness, humility, courage and charity. Amen, alleluia!