



RECOGNIZING CHRIST IN OTHERS!

In our Gospel story today, the two disciples on the Emmaus road walked all day with Christ and didn't recognize him until they offered him hospitality and he took, blessed, broke and shared the bread. How could that be? They were in Jesus' company and sat at his feet during his life on earth. They walked with him for about seven miles on Resurrection day. The Scriptures don't hint that he looked unusual-surrounded by light, having a transparent body. He seemed like any other traveler.

Could it be that Christ wants us to recognize him as he comes to us today, often disguised as the poor, the ill, or the cantankerous? Could it be that he wants us to be Christ for others as they travel with us?

The disciples in the Emmaus story are unnamed. They could be a man and woman. They represent us as we journey along life's path. Mother Theresa of Calcutta said that her goal was to see Christ in everyone she met, and to be Christ to those who met her. She saw Christ in believers and non-believers as well. She did not check their baptismal records before she picked their maggot-filled bodies out of the gutter. She saw everyone as redeemed by Christ.

Christ comes in many disguises. The Christ we meet today may not be as lovable as the babe in the crib or the Good Shepherd. If we treat everyone as we would treat Christ, then we won't miss his presence. Sometimes Christ comes in need: like the dying in the gutters of Calcutta, like the alcoholic living and begging on the streets, like the AIDs patient, like refugees, like those in mission lands.

Sometimes the Christ in others is aggravating or challenging: like the neighbor whose dog barks at night or who yells at your children, like the spouse who is controlling, like the child with an attitude. Sometimes Christ comes to instruct or admonish: like the priest in confession, like a police officer with a ticket, like a teacher, a doctor or a boss. If we resent authority, we may miss this face of Christ.

We learn to be like Christ by following his lead of reaching out to everyone. On the road to Emmaus Jesus kept a low profile. He walked as an equal. He met them where they were and gently led them to the truth, until "their hearts were burning within them." A method of evangelization used by a Catholic movement called Cursillo suggests three steps: Make a friend. Be a friend. Make your friend a friend of Christ. We need to know Christ before we can share Christ. We grow closer to him through studying Scripture, by praying, receiving the sacraments, and by developing friendships with others close to Christ. Christ embraces all. In the first reading, at God's command, Peter brought Christ to Cornelius, a gentile. Christ embraced a group of people Peter formerly would have shunned. We are Christ to others when we carry out the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Jesus says in Matthew 25:40 "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." Sometimes we preach more effectively by actions: when we smile at a sales clerk or give a waitress an extra tip, when we bring in the garbage cans for a neighbor or refuse to gossip, when we hug someone or listen with compassion.

This morning we will be participating in "the breaking of the bread." We believe that Christ is present under the form of bread and wine. We believe that we receive Christ when we consume the consecrated bread and wine. In a sense, as each of you comes forward for communion, the church is filling up with Christ in a fuller way. Our challenge is to believe that Christ lives in each of us through his Spirit, and then tell the world that Christ has risen and we are saved. Alleluia! Happy Easter!

