

May your hearts burn within you

When we suffer bitter disappointment over something, there is always a temptation to drown our sorrows. We might not literally turn to drink but we might seek consolation in other inappropriate ways. This could have been what was happening for the two disciples on the road to Emmaus.

They had placed all their hopes in Jesus and over the previous three days their hopes had been dashed. Now they had turned their backs on Jerusalem and were heading to Emmaus, a town just seven miles away. Although it has never been exactly sited, some commentators suggest that Emmaus might have been like the nightclub or casino districts in our modern cities: the sort of place people went to for fun and distraction or to drown their sorrows.

As with virtually every gospel encounter with Jesus, the two disciples' meeting with him that Easter night had dramatic consequences. Not only did they not stay the night in town as planned, they immediately turned back to Jerusalem, eager to share their news with the others.

Two crucial things had happened. Firstly, Jesus had opened their eyes to the connections in the scriptures. They could now see that he was the one foretold by the prophets and that the things said about him had come true. They realised that their hearts had been burning inside them as it was all made clear. Secondly, and what clinched it for them, was when Jesus broke bread at table and they saw the connection with the Eucharist.

With today's modern means of communication everyone wants to be first with the "breaking news". Well, this was breaking news all right and when these two disciples rejoined their companions the breaking news was confirmed. The Lord had risen and had also appeared to Simon.

From then on, their first duty would be to witness to the resurrection of Jesus, which is why all the great sermons in the Acts of the Apostles trace the story of our salvation through to the resurrection. The resurrection puts everything into perspective.

Peter's sermon at Pentecost in the first reading takes us back to David to prove the point and help us make the connections. And we hear him pressing home the point in his first letter as he reminds us that Jesus was raised to glory so that we would have faith and hope in God.

We are Christ's disciples today. Like the first disciples we are called upon first and foremost to witness to the resurrection. May we have our own Emmaus experiences; may our hearts burn within as we see the connections, not only in the scriptures but in our prayerful meetings with the Lord, above all at the breaking of bread.

This is why we gather for Mass, for it is here above all that we are united with the Lord and one another, and share in those saving events of Christ's passion, death and resurrection, and so become men and women of faith and hope. And once we see the connections, then we can help others put the picture together too.