

Third of Easter

Once the apostles had got over the shock on Easter day- did you notice? - Luke says that Jesus "opened their minds to understand the scriptures". Now: Where are we on this course? We have engaged over 3 years in discussions with this precise purpose. Have we made any progress towards understanding the Scriptures? A little, I think, but we have a long way to go.

Think about Peter's sermon recounted in today's first reading. It was perhaps a few weeks after Pentecost. He was a Jew. Hitherto his understanding of God and life was the same as the Pharisees. He had not thought much about it till Good Friday. Now he is clear. Christians and Jews have a common ancestry in Abraham, the prophets and all of the Old Testament. But Jesus had now taken it all a huge leap forward. Much of the old understanding was now obsolete. Like a snake's skin it had to be shed for the new life to spring forth. What was needed, and the Pharisees were too stuck in their ways to move, was a totally new mind-set and approach to God and the things of God.

We rehearsed this at the Easter vigil. From Easter day God has been moving the members of his church to understand what Jesus' life story meant and means in their lives.

20 Centuries on Pope Francis is still spelling out the meaning, now as it is in the terms of our 2018 experience. He has written another encyclical that we will read and gradually digest. But the trend we already know. It is the bones of our belief spelled out in today's two readings. It comes at a cost. It is to be found in the intimate life of family and our social circle.

Put simply: God creates each person in a family and for Christians in the family of Jesus. His intention is that each grows to be ready for eternal life in heaven. But this eternal bliss is not just given on a plate. It has to be earned. It comes only at a cost. Jesus' resurrection is a glorious achievement of love. It is because he loves us that he was ready to endure the humiliation, the scourging, the journey under the rough cross and the final excruciating hours on the cross. That is what it cost him. Without that cost – of loving - there is no achievement for us.

Peter had learned the lesson by the time he was preaching to the Jews who had put Jesus to death. He had been educated to think that strict obeying of Jewish law was what God wants. By now he knew that that shell of his religion was obsolete. He had to leave it behind. Exactly the same is now necessary for quite a number of Catholics. Simple presence at mass on a Sunday is not enough. Instead a real familiar meeting with Jesus on a regular basis has to be slowly built up. The joy which will be complete only in heaven does happen in small ways in this life. But the demands of suffering are equally inescapable. *Unless a man loses his life for my sake, he cannot save it.*

Our Pope is battling with priests bishops and people who may be very good, but they are stuck in old ways of thinking. These get in the way and prevent a healthy maturing of experience. Holiness is to be found in our families and workplaces. A lot of our old teaching about holy people in fact created a sort of ghost. Someone full of long prayers but remote from real life.

Not for the first time Jesus had to persuade the apostles to look at what was real under their noses. "Give me something to eat." "Touch my hands." The Old Testament is full of forecasts about a suffering servant: that is what Jesus would be. Fairy stories conclude: *And they lived happily ever after.* That makes it too easy. It belittles both what God is doing and what human courage can rise to. Jesus lived it out in a family. So do we.

Once again the Pope's letter has JOY in its title *Rejoice and be glad.* It is Easter. We are the Easter people. It happens simultaneously with the pain and yearning for better.