

This Sunday's Reading – The 3rd Sunday of Easter – There is one common theme that pervades both of today's readings – Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law (Scriptures) and of the prophets. Fr. Roger Karban in his 1999 syndicated column adds these thoughts on today's 1st and 3rd readings – “Sunday is one of those rare occasions when we have two Scripture passages (the first and third) composed by the same author: Luke. Homilists love such opportunities; they can point out how the writer presents the same theology in two different settings. When we explore Luke's theology, we find it revolves around a geographic place: Jerusalem. Although by the mid-80s when he writes, Jerusalem is no longer "geographical." The Roman army had almost wiped it off the map 15 years earlier. So Luke could use the city without fear that his readers would get lost in the literalness of the place. Luke transforms Jerusalem from a geographic point into a theological entity by making it the place where followers of Jesus suffer, die, rise, receive the Holy Spirit and are sent out to proclaim the Good News”.

The first reading is from Luke's Acts of the Apostles. The Acts of the Apostles is roughly divided into two parts. The first part describes the ministry of Peter, while the second part describes the ministry of Paul. Today's reading recounts Peter's sermon on Pentecost. This is just a small part of that sermon. It must be understood that Peter is not condemning the Israelites for crucifying Jesus. He is proving that all the events that lead up to and included the crucifixion, was in fulfillment of the Scriptures. That was the plan of God. Peter references David (Psalm 16:8-11 – “God the Supreme Good”) as further proof that Jesus was a descendant of David. Fr. Roger Karban in his 1999 syndicated column further explains the meaning and purpose of this first reading – “Luke is interested in conveying the necessity of Jesus' passion and death because he's trying to confront an attitude in his community that the life Jesus promises can be attained without the suffering and death Jesus experienced. That's why he revolves Peter's Pentecost proclamation around the same theme (Acts 2;14, 22-28). Before Peter mentions Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Spirit, he reminds the crowd (in Jerusalem), "this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. But God raised Him up, having freed Him from death, because it was impossible for Him to be held in its power." For Luke, the process is always the same: first suffering and death, then life”.

The Gospel reading is also from Luke. It recounts the story of two of Jesus' disciples (Clopas and his companion) encountering Jesus on the Road to Emmaus (pronounced eh-MAY-us). Fr. Roger Karban in his 1999 syndicated column adds this commentary on today's Gospel reading – “Contradicting the two earlier Gospels -- Mark and Matthew -- Luke's Jesus insists that His disciples not return to Galilee after His resurrection. They're to remain in Jerusalem until their "theological process" is completed, 50 days after the Passover feast which they originally traveled to Jerusalem to celebrate. In the Gospel (Lk 24;13-35), we see what happens when two disciples attempt to sneak back to Galilee on Easter Sunday morning. Jesus not only hurries out of Jerusalem to bring them back, but also in the process gives them a Scripture lesson on the necessity of dying before rising. Eventually, He reveals Himself to them in the setting Christians most expect to recognize Him in their midst: the breaking of bread. (It's there Jesus' followers most imitate His dying and rising by completely giving themselves to one another.) Luke believes and

teaches that Jesus' passion wasn't accidental, something He could have avoided under different circumstances. It was essential for reaching life. "Was it not necessary," the stranger asks the escaping disciples, "that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into His glory?" We know very little about Clopas except from this passage. However, there is a reference to Mary the wife of Clopas at the foot of the cross in John's Gospel. The exact location of Emmaus is also unknown. It might seem strange that the two disciples did not recognize Jesus until He opened the Scriptures and broke bread with them. It should not. For Luke described, liturgically, the Mass. We celebrate Mass on the "first day of the week" – Sunday. At Mass, we begin by opening the scriptures – The Liturgy of the Word – "He interpreted to them what referred to Him in all the Scriptures". We then celebrate the Liturgy of the Eucharist where the bread and wine are consecrated and then the bread is broken and shared – "while He was with them at table, He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them". Luke is the only New Testament writer to specify that the Messiah must suffer and die. Remember what Jesus said to Clopas and his companion – "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory". Also, Jesus "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures". Like Clopas and his companion, do we really understand the Scriptures and would we recognize Jesus today if He appeared to us?

As was mentioned earlier, the exact location of Emmaus is not known. However, John J. Pilch in his *The Cultural World of Jesus, Sunday by Sunday, Cycle A* describes 4 possible locations – "This story, unique to Luke, tells of Jesus' appearance to two disciples who had given up their faith and departed from the group of Jesus' disciples. They were traveling from Jerusalem to Emmaus when the risen Jesus joined them, seemingly out of nowhere, opened their eyes to the Scriptures, and then revealed himself to them in the breaking of the bread. Where exactly is Emmaus? This question helps move our reflection still further as we explore the "correct" understanding of Scripture. Pilgrims to modern-day Israel are shocked to learn that as many as six sites are identified as "Emmaus." Here are the four more popular ones.

(1) Latrun. The tradition of identifying this place as Luke's Emmaus reaches back to the historian Eusebius (330). Christians may have lived here since early times, but the first known Christian is Julius Africanus who in 221 obtained for this village from Rome the rights of a Roman city and a new name, Nicopolis. The Byzantine tradition never doubted this identification, but it seems to have been forgotten when a plague wiped the village out in 639. Modern archaeologists doubt that this is the place mentioned in Luke. It certainly is 160 stadia (31 km) from Jerusalem (see Luke 24:13), but other ancient manuscripts of Luke read 60 stadia, suggesting Abu Ghosh or Qubeiba as the more likely spot.

(2) Abu Ghosh. This is the village on the Jaffa road where the ark of the covenant rested for twenty years (1 Sam 6:21-7:2), but in Old Testament times it was located atop the hill, not in the valley. The crusaders, our embarrassingly ignorant, Christian, warrior-ancestors in the faith, did not know about Latrun. So in typical crusader style, they

measured 60 stadia from Jerusalem and identified the nearest village as Emmaus. When the crusaders were beaten in 1187 at the Battle of the Horns of Hattin, this place lost its importance mainly because travelers to Jerusalem used a different route. The identity of Emmaus was eventually transferred to Qubeiba.

(3) Qubeiba. Between 1114 and 1164, the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre founded a village here to intensify the agriculture of the region from which they drew sustenance. They named it Parva Mahomeria, perhaps because of a Muslim shrine already here (*el-Qubeiba* = “a little cupola”). As frequently happens in the Holy Land, later pilgrims assumed this place was related to the life of Christ, and since it was sixty stadia from Jerusalem, they identified it as Emmaus.

(4) “Most probable” Emmaus. After the Jewish War against Rome in 66-70 C.E., Vespasian assigned eight hundred discharged veterans to live in a place called “Emmaus,” located about thirty stadia, or four miles, from Jerusalem. Their encampment completely overshadowed the little town, and the site was given the name (until recently) Qoloniya. Abandoned in 1948, it was located near contemporary Motza. The round trip between Jerusalem and this place is sixty stadia, or about seven miles, half of this being a very plausible distance allowing the disciples to get up from table right after supping with Jesus and to return immediately to Jerusalem (Luke 24:33).

This brief archaeology and geography lesson suggests that those who read the Bible or understand their beliefs too literally will surely encounter serious problems. Jesus was able to “correct” the misunderstanding of his followers only because they were already familiar with the Scripture about him. Modern scholarship offers similar assistance to interested contemporary believers. “Blind” faith, after all, is a curious gift to return to the creator of human intelligence”.

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