

“Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.” Cleopas and his companion were not the only BELIEVERS who didn’t recognize Jesus in their midst – Mary Magdalene also failed to recognize him, thinking he was the gardener at the gravesite. WHY?

For Cleopas and his friend it could have been fear, after all, the apostles locked themselves in the upper room in fear of reprisal from the Jews, and we find these two hightailing it out town. With Mary, or any of the others, it could have been that the last image they had of Jesus, the one that would be foremost in their mind, was that of a brutally beaten man, torn and disfigured by his tormentors, whom they saw die on the cross. The LAST person they would expect to see is the glorified Risen Lord.

Yet he IS glorified, he IS risen, he IS in their midst, and he is recognized in his words, the calling of a name, the saying of a blessing, and by his actions - the breaking of the bread. He opens their eyes when he enlightens their hearts and their minds. “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us?”

We today have that same opportunity to have “our hearts burning within us” as we not only listen to, but ABSORB the word of God, and partake of the Easter Sacrifice, Holy Communion - bread blessed, broken, and given to us. Full participation in the Mass through our response to prayers, in raising our voices in glorious praises in song, and making ourselves humble in the presence of Our Lord and King as we ask for his forgiveness of our transgressions, all to the best of our abilities, thus opening ourselves to be enlightened and emboldened by Jesus himself. To not only see Jesus with our eyes, but to JOIN with him with our hearts and minds as well.

Over the past several weekends, we've celebrated within our faith community the Church's rites of initiation – Baptisms, First Holy Communion, and Confirmation. The littlest ones had the stain of original sin washed away through the cleansing waters of Baptism. Our second graders received Jesus physically into themselves for the first time in partaking of his precious body and blood in celebrating their First Holy Communion. And adults were fully initiated into the Catholic faith with the infusion of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, being sealed with Holy Chrism in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Through these sacraments, as with ALL the sacraments, the Holy Church grows stronger. But the Church, US, can become weak, fearful, and even blind, if we stray from the truth and the light that is Jesus. Just as an old photograph, the smell of perfume, a certain handshake or a hug can bring alive again, in our hearts and minds, a friend or loved one who has passed, so too does regular attendance at Mass and reception of the Lord in Holy Communion keep Jesus alive AND RECOGNIZABLE in OUR hearts and lives.

The mission which Jesus received from his Father, that which he passed on to the Apostles, which we as Catholics, his disciples, have inherited, is as true today as it was 2000 years ago – to bring all mankind to know, love, and serve God in this world and the next. We do this best when we remain STRONG in our faith, and allow our hearts and minds to always recognize Jesus, in his words, and in the breaking of the bread.