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We have already had two homilies today, embedded in the first and third readings. In his address on Pentecost Peter explains the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection, reinforced with a citation of Psalm 16, which is repeated in today's responsorial Psalm. In the Gospel reading, Jesus interprets Moses, meaning the Pentateuch or the Law, and "all the Prophets." This reflects the two portions of their ancient texts that the Jews of that time considered to be revealed scripture. As such, we can expect that Jesus' talk was much longer than Peter's. One thing that they both have in common is they each apply passages from the First Testament to their own situation. This compensates somewhat for the fact that we don't have a reading from the First Testament today, nor in the coming weeks, so that we can hear the story of the early church up until the feast of Pentecost. At the same time, the homilies in today's texts fit my model of a great homily, which is based on Jesus' visit to the Nazareth synagogue, where he read from the scroll of Isaiah, closed it and said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

It is intimidating to follow either Peter or Jesus, never mind both. I would not presume to replace what Peter and Jesus said about the First Testament texts. But their application of those texts to their own time is embedded in newer texts, so I would like to reflect with you on two things that emerge for me from today's Gospel passage, the encounter with Jesus by two disciples on the road to Emmaus, and some possible implications for us today.

This episode comes in Luke's Gospel immediately after the visit by Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other unnamed women to Jesus' tomb to anoint him with spices (read in the Easter Vigil). But they find the stone rolled away and the tomb empty. Two men in dazzling clothes appear and tell them that Jesus has risen, and the women return to tell the apostles ("the eleven") and other disciples. But Luke tells us that "these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them." We today are quite familiar with the story of the resurrection, but it would have been an astounding, if not unbelievable, report for those disciples who have been shattered by the brutal death of their leader two days earlier. The women found an empty tomb, but unlike in Matthew's Gospel, they did not encounter Jesus himself, so they had no concrete evidence to support the claim that Jesus had risen.



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So today we read about two disciples, who presumably were part of the group who had heard the women's report, travelling to Emmaus. We don't know whether they were fleeing in fear or simply on a journey, but they were discussing what they had heard earlier that day. Then Jesus himself joined these two disciples on the road, but Luke tells us that "their eyes were kept from recognizing him." In scripture, the passive voice often indicates divine action, which I will return to later.

After they describe the morning's events to Jesus, with the sense that they do not understand what has happened, Jesus explains how the scriptures testified to himself, and that the Christ needed to suffer before entering into his glory. He stopped with them at Emmaus and during the evening meal he blessed and broke the bread, at which point "their eyes were opened," and he then immediately vanished.

This brings me to the first point that struck me in this passage, namely the nature of Jesus' risen body. When they first encounter Jesus, something, and the passive voice here points to divine action, prevents them from recognizing him, and when they eventually do, he disappears. These elements parallel other resurrection appearances. In the appendix to Mark's Gospel he "appears" to Mary Magdalene, "in another form" to two who were walking (our passage?) and then to the eleven sitting at the table; in each case this reads like a sudden miraculous appearance rather than just walking up to them. In Luke, after these two disciples return to Jerusalem Jesus suddenly stood among the whole group, and they thought it was a ghost. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus stood among the disciples even though the door was locked, and does the same a week later during the episode with Thomas that we read last week. In other words, this is not the usual human body, but one that transcends the limitations of space and time, one that is able to pass through walls and appear and disappear at will, and one that his followers do not always recognize at first (in addition to this Emmaus passage, in the Fourth Gospel Mary Magdalene initially thinks he is the gardener), until Jesus performs an action that opens their eyes to who he is, such as calling Mary by name or breaking the bread in Emmaus. Even in the other stories, Jesus always takes the initiative to present himself to the disciples.



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But it is still a physical body, since the women take hold of his feet in Matthew, the disciples touch him and he eats a piece of fish later in Luke, John emphasizes the wounds in his body from the crucifixion, and in this passage he is able to hold bread.

The risen Jesus has a physical body, but one that at the same time is different from ours. This reflects the unique feature of the resurrection that sets it apart from our instances of what I would call resuscitations. Both Elijah and Elisha brought a woman's only son back to life, Jesus raised the widow of Nain's son, Jairus' daughter and Lazarus, and in Acts Peter raised Tabitha and Paul brought back a young man who fell out a third floor window. But all of these people eventually died again. Jesus did not. As Peter tells us in the first reading, "God . . . freed him from death . . . because it was impossible for him to be held in its power," and Jesus himself tells the two disciples on the road that the Christ had to suffer before entering into his glory.

Unlike the others, Jesus has broken the power of death and so could not die again. His physical yet transformed body is a sign of this, and an anticipation of the glorified body that Paul promises we will also receive (1 Cor 15:35-53; cf. Rom 8:23)

Returning to the Emmaus story, the two disciples recognize that it is Jesus when he breaks the bread. The echoes of the last supper in this phrase are obvious, so that they encounter Jesus in the ritual celebration of his death and resurrection. Moreover, this made them realize how inspirational it was as Jesus earlier interpreted the scriptures for them as they had walked along the road. This anticipates our modern worship, where we first read and reflect on scripture texts in the liturgy of the word, followed by the liturgy of the eucharist.

As soon as they realize who had been their companion on the road and at the meal, these two disciples immediately returned to Jerusalem to tell the others about their encounter with the risen Jesus. Since Luke makes a point of telling us that it was 11 kilometres distance, I thought that might be important, so I consulted an authoritative source, namely Google, to learn that it takes on average between 10 and 20 minutes to walk one kilometre. So after having walked between 2-4 hours to get to Emmaus, even though it was now evening and they were probably tired from the journey, they did not hesitate in retracing their steps, although they may have run at least part way in their excitement.



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We too have been invited by Jesus to encounter his body every time we break bread during the eucharist. In the current crisis those of us on Zoom cannot actually consume the elements, but we have come together as a church community, to participate virtually in the celebration of the liturgy. I'm sure that someday theologians will spill a lot of ink discussing the differences between a Zoom liturgy like this compared to a TV or a livestreamed Mass. But for now I think that even though we are not physically present with each other, through our shared experience we still form the body of Christ that is the church, whatever size the community. And like the disciples in Emmaus, we should also be inspired to rush to tell others about our experience. But for the foreseeable future we will have to do so from a distance.

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