

3rd Sunday of Easter 2008

Fr. Robert VerEecke, S.J.

We had hoped that he would be the one to redeem Israel. We had hoped. Those are pretty sad words. You can almost see the dejected, disappointed faces of the twelve disciples on the road as they speak to the "only stranger in Jerusalem who did not know what had happened." The hopes and dreams they had for the future were shattered with the death of Jesus on the Cross. Even the stories that the women who discovered the empty tomb were telling, were not enough to keep them hoping against hope.

The power of this gospel story for us is that we can all relate to the disciples "we had hoped". What have been the times in your own life when your own hopes and dreams were not realized. Have you ever said, I had hoped that I would get this work. I had hoped that I would succeed in my career. I had hoped that life would be better. I had hoped... Fill in the blanks. We all have had hopes and dreams that do not materialize. The question of course is what you do when you see your hopes and dreams vanish before you? Do you carry that disappointment and even bitterness with you? Do you refuse to ever hope and dream again? You wonder what would have happened to those two disciples if they had not been stopped by the "only stranger in Jerusalem". Would Jesus of Nazareth be "one of the memories of the past that made their hearts cold when they remembered him?"

The story tells us something else. The "only stranger in Jerusalem who has not heard" is no stranger. He is in fact their friend Jesus accompanying them on the road. What Jesus reveals to them is that their hopes and dreams that "he would be the one to redeem Israel" was not God's hope and dream for the world. God's dream for human kind is so much more. God's dream is for a world where all are united together in the sacrificial love of Jesus, pouring himself out on the Cross. God's dream is an end to the violence and hatred that causes the kind of suffering that Jesus knew. God's dream is that all be fed and nourished at the table of God's love. God's dream is that there be no more barriers of sin and death that keep God's beloved sons and daughters, separate and alienated from him. And that is why the story brings those disciples to the table to be a part of God's dream. As it turns out the disciples' dreams are much, much too small, too personal, too exclusive. God's dream is God's dream.

And so instead of Jesus being one of the memories of the past that made their hearts cold, the disciples experience

Jesus as a living memory that makes their hearts burn within them.

How about you and me? Do we want to be part of God's dream? Will we let go of our own personal, sometimes much too small hope and dreams so that God's dream can become a reality. Cold hearts of burning hearts? That's the choice we have.