

Catechetical Sunday Introduction

September 15, 2019

The Journey to Emmaus

(Lk. 24: 13-35)

Every year the Catholic Church in America observes “Catechetical Sunday” in September. The ECED (Eastern Catholic Eparchial Directors of Religious Education) provides resource materials to our parishes in preparation for their upcoming Eastern Christian Formation programs.

Our theme and reflection for 2019 is “The Journey to Emmaus,” Luke, 24: 13-35. In this Gospel we see Jesus the Master Catechist, brilliantly taking advantage of a pedagogical opportunity. He attentively listens to Cleopas and his companion relate everything they have seen and heard about Jesus. When they finish speaking Jesus begins to explain to them what they do not understand. His lesson plan has three goals:

- Break Open the Scriptures
- Deepen Their Appreciation of His Presence in the Eucharist
- Rekindle Their Hope

Break Open the Scriptures

In his writings St. Cyril of Alexandria tells us the two Emmaus disciples are not among the eleven apostles but could well be from the seventy who followed Jesus. They were acquainted with the O.T scriptures but had difficulty understanding the role of Jesus in the Plan of Salvation. When Jesus says, “How slow you are to believe everything the prophets said,” (Lk. 24: 25) two things about this statement should be noted: First, belief in Jesus is connected to proper understanding of the scriptures. In addition, all of scripture bears a prophetic, messianic significance. In breaking open the scriptures Jesus showed them it was necessary for Him to suffer, die and rise from the dead so all that was written about Him could be fulfilled. Jesus’ entire life was foreshadowed in scripture.

Deepen Their Appreciation of His Presence in the Eucharist

As the journey continues Jesus accepts the invitation to dine with Cleopas and his companion, taking the opportunity for another catechetical experience. “When He was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight.” (Lk. 24:30-32) Once again Jesus is reviewing the scriptures for his audience. Bread blessed, broken and given fed the five thousand and the participants at the Last Supper. (Lk. 9:16 & 22:19) St. Ephrem the Syrian tells us, “When the disciples eyes were closed, bread too was the key whereby their eyes were opened to recognize the omniscient.” (Hymn on Paradise 15:4)

The structure of the Emmaus episode reflects the structure of the Eucharistic Liturgy, where Jesus gives Himself to the Church in word and sacrament, in the proclamation of the scripture and in the Eucharistic Bread of Life.

Rekindle their Hope

“They said to each other, did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures.” (Lk. 24: 32) “Holy Scripture speaks of the heart as the inner essence of a human being, the core and center of the entire person. The spiritual and moral state of the whole person depends on the state of the heart.” (Christ Our Pascha #747) Cleopas and his companion experienced a change of heart with their encounter with the Risen Christ and reminds us that even in our confusion, God is with Us.

“The definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy with Jesus Christ.” (GDC #80, Catechesis Tradendae) Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, through the ministry of catechesis we learn the answers to any questions about our existence can be found in the scriptures and in Jesus Christ.