



Annunciation Chalice and Paten

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

Today, this Third Sunday of Easter, we turn to the Gospel of Luke, to hear about two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. Those disciples, Cleopas and his companion (was it Mrs. Cleopas?), are trying to make sense of that old Christian virtue of hope.

They are returning home, getting back to normal as best they could, after having experienced truly amazing, unforeseen events in Jerusalem; events that shattered what they thought was a dependable equilibrium of things, a normal that just got upended. For Jesus, their teacher, seven days earlier hailed as King, two days ago was nailed to a cross – perhaps they were eye-witnesses? They recount that others have begun to tell of encounters with Jesus risen; but their last certainty of Him was crucifixion and death.

And they give voice to three of the saddest words spoken in the Scriptures: “we had hoped.”

They had hoped that Jesus was the Messiah. They had hoped he would bring to fulfillment all that had been promised through the ages. They had hoped that from Palm Sunday onward it would have been Palm Sunday forever after. And then came Good Friday. And all their hopes were left at Calvary and the Tomb. Their hope is past tense, and past. “We had hoped,” they say. Not “we are hopeful.”

It’s in the plural, too, isn’t it? Not “I had hoped,” but “we had hoped.” Why is that? Well, to include you and me, all of us, as well. In these days of upended normalcy, of thrown-off equilibrium, of pandemic shut-downs and sheltering in place, where is our hope for the future? What were our hopes for the future?

Allow me to observe what I've observed before: hope is not easy optimism. Pessimism is the belief that things will turn out bad, no matter what you or I or anyone else does about it. Optimism is the belief that things will turn out good, no matter what you or I or anyone else does about it. Hope, Christian hope, is the virtue, the strength of character, that rolls up the sleeves to do what we can, here and now, and in the days that will surely follow, to bring forth good, even from ill...to be good in the very face of sickness, illness, disease, stupidity, selfishness, and death; in the face of all that is not of God and hurtful to God's children.

Hope makes us co-workers with the Lord. Hope puts us to work.

We had hoped. Such words give the last word to all that would defeat us. They are words of resignation, really, words that find no meaning or purpose in the sufferings of the age. They are hopeless, "I quit" sorts of words. Words that excuse and absolve us from life. Hope, however, demands an accounting of suffering.

But our usual accounting of suffering betrays our superficial, "cultural" Christianity of niceties and pleasantries. In the face of suffering and death, we tend to do one of two things. Either we try to explain it away – the explanations giving us a false security; or we ignore it altogether, numbing ourselves with entertainment and consumption and diversion and addiction, or whatever it takes.

But here's what real Christianity does with suffering and death: it is real, it is inescapable, it reveals life's purpose and meaning. And its embrace begets hope in us: something good will come from it, depending on what you and I bring to it.

Allow me another observation. To embrace suffering and death risks sounding morbid and morose...like I'm only happy when I'm miserable. Think of a mother, whose son has just been rightly convicted and sentenced in a court of law. She hugs him. Not because she contests the conviction and the sentence; not because she sees nothing wrong with the crime. But because she loves her son, and the only thing she has to bring to his brokenness is her love. Think of that Father (the True Prodigal of the Story) of that Prodigal Son: a life of rebellion and dissipation is met with a hug. He brings love's healing balm to apply to that wound.

In these ways, real Christianity, and real Christian living, embrace suffering and death, and we are revealed to ourselves. We are restored to ourselves, and we are returned to God. We preach Christ Crucified, Risen, and eternally bearing the marks of His Passion. Out of love for us, He takes up His Cross, and He conquers all in me, all in you, that keeps us from God.

If I may, this is how I know Christianity is true: it neither easily explains away death nor readily denies it; it responds to suffering and death with arms outstretched, ready to embrace. This is why I am a Christian.

But there is more. In the Emmaus Passage for today, after instructing His disciples (including you and me) through the Law and the Prophets that the Messiah had to suffer, and thereby calling them (and us) to a living hope – a hope enlightened by faith that shows us how to bring love to suffering and death – He doesn't leave them to their own efforts. "Go give it a try, Mr. and Mrs. Cleopas. See if you can do what I do." No, He gives them, and us, His Eucharistic Presence. He gives Himself. So that our efforts are joined to Him, our efforts are His.

Christianity is the loving response to the reality of brokenness and suffering and death in our lives; this is why I am a Christian. Catholic Christianity celebrates, memorializes, actualizes, nourishes, nurtures, strengthens, secures (are there enough active verbs available?), makes real, this loving response in the Eucharist. He is really present to us; in the breaking of bread our hope is renewed...like disciples on the road.

Yours in the Risen Christ,
Fr. Grogan

P.S. Have you gotten your [Easter Candle](#) for use in your Home Prayer? They are available in Church for pick-up all Easter Season. Have you [blessed your home](#) yet, during these Fifty Days? Are you praying our [Easter Procession](#)? It is still Easter! Together (albeit separately) let us keep the Feast!