

Eucharistic homily

Delivered by Fr. Jim Conner OCSO 6 April 2008 –
Third Sunday of Easter

For these past days we have been considering the words of Thomas Merton regarding the stranger. And so it is striking to hear in the gospel today: 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' Here it is Jesus Himself who is the stranger. 'Their eyes were kept from recognizing Him'. It was not just the fact that the Risen Lord appeared so different. The disciples were deeply saddened and depressed. 'We had hoped ...'. It was possible to recognize Him only in that sign of hope that He had left the disciples – the breaking of the bread.

Jesus Christ, the Risen Lord, comes among us today in this liturgy. But do we truly recognize Him? Like the disciples, our world today is filled with sadness and depression. We watch the news and that sadness only increases as we see men and women and children throughout the world suffer war, violence and atrocities of all kinds. We see politicians and businesses involved in graft, greed and immorality. And like the disciples, we feel 'we had hoped'! But that hope is driven out by the greed, avarice and inhumanity of people throughout the world. But we forget the words of the psalmist: 'The Lord is close to the brokenhearted; He saves those whose spirit is crushed' (Ps 34:19). We forget that Christ came among us as a stranger 'and His own did not receive Him' (Jn 1:11). Even the people of his own town could not accept him, because they thought that they knew him. But He befriended the strangers – the prostitutes and tax collectors, the lepers, the unclean. He accepted us as people who were estranged from God. And He gave his very life out of love for us. As Peter said in the second reading:

'You were ransomed not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ'.

And He calls us to do the same. 'Whatever you do to the least of my brethren, you do to me' (Mt 25:40). Like the people of Nazareth, we think that we know one another and those we encounter in daily life. But we never truly get to know the heart of the other. We do not know their pain and anxiety. In fact, we do not allow ourselves to know their heart, because if we did, we would have to know our own heart. And that requires that we face our own pain and anxiety. Yet only then will our eyes be opened. Only then will we realize that, as Paul tells us, 'You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God' (Eph 2:19). Only then will we recognize the Risen Lord in every person we meet.

In his Easter homily this year, Pope Benedict said: 'Selfishness, injustice, hatred and violence are the scourges of humanity, open and festering wounds in every part of this planet. They are waiting to be tended and healed by the glorious wounds of our risen Lord and by the solidarity of people who, following in his footsteps, perform deeds of charity in his Name, make an active commitment to justice and bring hope to areas of the world bloodied by conflict'. In these words the Risen Lord gives hope to the world, but also gives us the challenge to walk in the footsteps of Christ. We are to realize that no one is a stranger, for every person is known and loved by God.

We come here today to celebrate this great Mystery. We do so through the breaking of the bread. And in that breaking, may our eyes also be opened, so that as we go forth from this place, our hearts may truly burn within us with a love for all people, knowing that they are truly a part of ourselves and we are a part of them and we are all united in the one Christ who calls us to continue His work of reconciliation throughout the world, beginning with the first person we encounter on leaving here. Then the seed of hope can be sown in our world and if that seed is nurtured by our own hope and trust in the Risen Lord, it can grow into a great tree to give shade and shelter to those in need. Then, like the disciples in the gospel, we can return to our people and perhaps recognize them for the first time and proclaim 'Truly, the Lord is risen! Alleluia!'