

“Synodality and the Silence of Holy Saturday”.

The Philip Endean SJ Memorial Lecture

1. What is happening today?

An odd fact: almost nothing of any liturgical importance seems to take place on this extraordinary day of Holy Saturday; now it is true that here at Stonyhurst, there will be all sorts of plans to keep the younger ones occupied and busy. But liturgically almost nothing goes on from the end of Good Friday service to the great feast tonight in which we shall celebrate the Resurrection of the Lord: it is a very *silent* time. What I want to do today is to look at the Emmaus story, which is my private model of Synodality; and I should like you to think at the same time of that terrible silence, when Jesus was dead and buried in what must have looked like a very permanent way.

2. Remembering Philip Endean

And along with that, I invite you to reflect on the astonishing gift to us that was Philip Endean, “theologian and disciple”, who for so many years was a key performer in this Holy Week retreat, and who is so very much missed after his sad death last year. And there is another remarkable fact; for today is the 40th anniversary of the death of Karl Rahner, the great German Jesuit theologian on whom Philip worked with so much illuminating brilliance. Philip will certainly approve of this happy coincidence.

3. The Emmaus Story: a Liturgy?

The Emmaus story is an extraordinary one; and I should like to invite you to look at it in a rather unusual way. I want you to see it as a liturgy, something that Luke has carefully constructed. And you will see where we are going from here: if the Emmaus story is indeed a liturgy, then we learn from it how we are to cope with the awfulness of Jesus’ absence, a terrible confession of failure, and at the same time we gain the Spirit-filled certainty that Jesus remains present to the church’s mission of evangelisation.

4. The Penitential Rite

So I want to suggest that we start as liturgy should start, with the penitential rite. That is the moment when we pour out our sins and miseries, and ask the Lord to heal us and make us better. But notice that we need Jesus to be there in the story. And he is there, but in that invisible way that we always find so difficult. So we watch as “two of them” trudge the seven or eight mile journey from Jerusalem to their destination; and we listen as they reflect with each other “on all these things which had happened”. We can guess what kind of a conversation they were having: disillusioned, and disappointed, and utterly down in the dumps. And then suddenly, and to them quite invisibly, Jesus is with them; Luke allows *us*, however, to see him, and so we are we are ahead of the game, as Jesus “journeyed with them”.

5. The Journey

That word, “journey” is a very important word in Luke’s gospel and then in Luke’s second volume, Acts of the Apostles. And a “Synod”, of course is a “journeying together”. Indeed, you could argue that both of Luke’s volumes, and especially the second volume, are themselves journeys; and that they are directed entirely by the Holy Spirit, who is, you might say, the navigating genius of this extraordinary story. Then we notice that they are “conversing and arguing”, so much so that they do not have the energy to observe that the Jesus whom they are looking for is now actually one of the party; and, because this is a Synod that is developing, he speaks to them, “although their eyes were held so as not to recognize him”. And he asks, all innocently, you’ll notice, “what are these words that you are hurling at each other as you walk along?”. Then, like schoolboys caught smoking, they stop, with long faces, and one of them, Cleopas, shifts to attack: “are you the *only* person living in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?”. It does not escape us of course, that Cleopas is talking to the only person in Jerusalem who *does* know the things that have happened there.

So the Penitential Rite unfolds, as they pour out their misery: ironically they instruct Jesus about precisely “Jesus of Nazareth, a man, a prophet powerful in Word and deed before God and before all the people, and how our chief priests and our rulers handed him over for capital punishment and they crucified him”. And then, in what are sometimes described as the “saddest words in the entire New Testament”, they say that “we *had* been hoping that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel”. And of course that is now impossible, because the Messiah cannot possibly die, particularly such a horrible death, which means that all this time they had been backing a loser; and they have now abandoned all such hope. Jesus is, after all, a hopeless failure.

And as they pour out their woes, as is only right and proper in a penitential rite, we glimpse that after all they do have a grip on the truth. For, it turns out, some of the womenfolk had got to the tomb earlier that morning (and don't ask where the men were by the way; they were locked away in gibbering terror). And we are told of how they had seen “a vision of angels, who said he was alive!” You can hear underneath the text their dismissive response to the women (“you know what women are”, they are muttering). Not only that, but “some of those with us went off to the tomb and found it just as the women had said. But “him they did not see”. So it can't be true... Or can it?

6. The Liturgy of the Word

So there you have it: the story is put before us, and it is what all we already know to be the case, that Jesus has indeed been raised from the dead; so it is our task to discern the presence and action of Christ through prayerful listening together. What happens next? Well, that was the Penitential Rite, and Jesus now starts his response; the mode is *quite* unexpected, because he begins the Liturgy of the Word, not, by what you might think of as customary academic courtesy, by thanking them for their remarkable and helpful contributions, but with words that many a priest would like to use to start his or her homily, but never quite dares: “you **stupid** men, and slow of heart to believe in everything that the prophets had told”. So the penitential rite has taken an unexpected turn, and we are now led into the Liturgy of the Word. And Jesus gives them, it must be admitted, a fair old range of readings, “beginning with

Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things that were about him". We do not know how long the sermon, or indeed the readings that preceded it, may have lasted; but it gets them to their destination, "the village to which they had been journeying".

7. The Bidding Prayers

Then after this liturgy of the word we have the bidding prayers: "Jesus pretended that he was journeying further". They in response make their prayer, which says, "stay with us, because it is towards evening, and the day has already gone to bed". This gets a more positive answer than many of our bidding prayers: "and he went in to stay with them".

8. The Eucharist Continues

Now we continue into the Offertory and the Communion Rite: "and it happened that when he lay down with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them". We do not need to be told that this is the rite of communion; those or similar words have been uttered in such circumstances in Christian Eucharists for over 2000 years now, and they are deeply familiar. We shall hear them tonight, their meaning tinged by the joy and radiance of Easter. And it has its effect: "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him", as has happened, at least occasionally, to each of us when we took part in a Eucharist.

9. Recognising the Lord: thanksgiving after Communion?

Now comes the next stage of the service: the mere fact of recognition has a very powerful effect on them. For Jesus is now invisible to them, as he was before, but this time they know the truth about the Resurrection, and so his invisibility *does not matter*. The mood is one of unrestrained rejoicing: "and they said to each other, 'was not our heart burning within us as he spoke to us on the way as he explained/interpreted the scriptures to us?'". This is clearly what we used to call the "Thanksgiving after Communion", and they are sharing the mystery, getting deeper into it.

10. The dismissal on mission

Now we have been given our instructions: “Itemissa Est”. And if the liturgy has gone well, that means that we are sent on our way, which does not mean away from the rediscovered Christ, but towards him, the one who will be waiting for us “out there”. We are to proclaim the good news. And the same will be true for us tonight, and every night or day when we celebrate the liturgy properly. Not only that, but the journey which we were told was “60 stades”, (7 or 8 miles), was accomplished on the return journey in what was clearly a world record time, from Emmaus back to Jerusalem. And this was only a few minutes after the two of them had warned Jesus not to go any further, because the day had “gone to bed”, and it was far too late for that sort of thing. That is what good liturgy can do for you; it gives you a mission. Pray that it will happen to you tonight, and for the rest of your life.

11. The Reunification of the Church

We are still not there, you see: now, as the liturgy approaches its end, (which is of course also a beginning) they make it, breathlessly, back to Jerusalem and the Eleven and those with them, listening to one another in the Spirit. So the Church is now reunited, which of course is the aim of Pope Francis’ call to Synod. Now we find them celebrating the essential fact that, as they say excitedly, “it is really true that the Lord has been raised, and appeared to Simon”. And of course that is something of a miracle in itself; you will remember at the last thing we saw Simon doing was cursing and swearing and denying that he ever heard of this Jesus person; and now we listen in awe as they tell the little group about how they “recognised him in the breaking of the bread”.

12. Where will the Synod take us?

Do you see how everything has now suddenly come right? And what has this to do with the other element that we are looking at over this Easter weekend, namely that of the Synod? Well, we have in a sense, been sharing here in that Synod, watching in joyful admiration as the disciples, through encounter with Jesus and through listening to that voice of the Spirit, found their way to the deepest truth of all, that God has indeed raised Jesus from the dead. And, above all, we move towards a

completely different way of being Church by “listening to one another in the Spirit”. That is what Synod is about.

This encounter, first on the miserable road, and then in the lying down to share the Eucharist, has been an extraordinary instance of a Synod taking place. Jesus was there all the time, and eventually, after pouring out all their woes and insecurities, they were brought to recognize his presence; and, as we have seen, that made all the difference. They have now embraced the central truth of Christianity, which is nothing else than the astonishing claim that God has raised Jesus from the dead. That makes sense of all our lives of all our Synod preparations, and of our retreat here at Stonyhurst; Jesus is with us and we are listening. Then it is for us today, and always, to recognise that central fact. If we do, then there really is nothing to fear.

13. Remembering Philip Endean

That was the deep truth that I encountered the last time that I saw Philip Endean; my superiors had given me permission, and indeed encouragement, to go to Paris and see him and to make our farewell; as I said to him, I was not clear whether this was Au Revoir or Adieu; he shrugged his shoulders, in a characteristic gesture. What stayed with me, though, was the absolute sense of peace that surrounded him that day there in his room in the community in Paris. For me, as I know for many of you, it was an immense gift to have been given, to have Philip as a friend, and of course as a fellow-Jesuit. And I make no doubt that we shall all be reunited at the end, in the Resurrection in which Philip so profoundly believed.

Conclusion

I should like to end with a line from a very important article of his, on “Who do you say Ignatius is?”

“Our sense of meaning and identity as Jesuits constantly passes through cycles of loss and resurrection. Our security comes, not simply from what we know of the past, nor from any law or constitution setting out norms of behaviour for us, but rather from the creative fidelity of God, at work then, and at work now, at once ever old and ever new”.

May he rest in peace and let us celebrate that faith of Philip, today and tonight, in the profound silence of Holy Saturday.