

Many say we learn from experience and thus acquire the skills to make it from day to day; others say true experience amounts to a shattering of our expectations, whereby we learn to expect the unexpected.

Today's Gospel reading about the two depressed disciples unwittingly meeting up with the risen Jesus on the road to Emmaus presents us with so beautiful and suspenseful a narrative that we almost feel we actually share their surprise when Jesus – in breaking the bread – reveals he is more alive than ever. I mean the text hardly needs a homilist because it is simply eloquent, so engaging or experiential as it is.

So maybe this year it's time to revert to the first reading for this Sunday – taken from *The Acts of the Apostles* - wherein Peter, no longer afraid to identify with Jesus, delivers his Pentecost discourse to a crowd of pilgrims in Jerusalem. In it he quotes Psalm 16 of the Hebrew Testament. The part he quotes might describe the status of those two disciples – after that experience in Emmaus. They might want to declare along with the Psalmist that forever after that evening meal:

I saw the Lord ever before me, / with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed. / Therefore my heart has been glad and my tongue has exulted; / my flesh, too, will dwell in hope, / because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld, / nor will you suffer your holy one to see corruption. / You have made known to me the paths of life; / you will fill me with joy in your presence.

That's the effect these resurrection narratives are intended to have upon us – to convince us beyond any scientific evidence that there is more to life than the everydayness we endure. There are experiences that arrive from beyond the limits of that collective forgetfulness by which we devalue our existence, our true destiny.

Twenty-seven years ago on April 28th my younger son died, age 23. I never had had such an experience. Like the disciples in today's Gospel I mourned, discussed, lost sleep over the vacancy left by what people called the "love of my life". Of course no Jesus appeared to explain things to me but Lewis Carroll did by way of his Lobster Quadrille in his Wonderland story. In it Alice meets a Mock Turtle along the seashore who introduces her to a dance performed by whittings, seals, turtles . . . but not a snail! It goes:

"See how eagerly the lobsters and the turtles all advance! They are waiting on the shingle—will you come and join the dance? Will you, won't you, will you, won't you, will you join the dance?" . . . / "You can really have no notion how delightful it will be When they take us up and throw us, with the lobsters, out to sea!" But the snail replied, "Too far, too far!" and gave a look askance — Said he thanked the whiting kindly, but he would not join the dance. / "What matters it how far we go?" his scaly friend replied. "There is another shore, you know, upon the other side. The further off from England the nearer is to France. Then turn not pale, beloved snail, but come and join the dance."

My reaction to that manner of Christ's arriving beside me in my sorrow? Tears of course but also a spontaneous address made to my son: *See you in France, Phil!*

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