

3rd Sunday of Easter (A)
(Acts 2:14.22-28 / Luke 24:13-35)
26.04.2020

In the beginning is the truth...

Our Gospel reading begins with an eloquent exercise of truthful speaking. Cleopas does what is very difficult for most of us to do: he speaks the truth. Questioned by Jesus about what he is thinking and about his conversation with his friend, Cleopas does not answer, as we would do: "Nothing, all is fine!" He opens his heart and connects with his true feelings.

His words do not fall on deaf ears, on the ears of somebody who is busy looking at his or her iPhone and who is just remotely interested by the conversation.

Cleopas speaks the truth because he knows, at least intuitively, that the stranger is going to listen to him. And here are two important truths: we speak truthfully only when we know that the person in front of us is able, willing, to hear what we want to say. If we suppose or feel and fear that our interlocutor is going to reject, dismiss or ignore our words, then we opt for silence.

This means that we are all responsible for the atmosphere we create around us. We can either foster trust and openness or give the impression that we are too busy to care for others.

The second truth is that Jesus is interested by what we feel and experience in life. He longs to know what is happening with us, not like a nosy "big brother" but as somebody who is able to carry with us all that burdens us and slows down our pace.

At a time of self-isolation and social distancing, when is the last time we have asked a member of our families and relatives: "How are you? What are you discussing at the moment?" being really attentive to the answer which is about to come our way.

Because truth calls for truth, the Risen Lord answers Cleopas truthfully.

He speaks the truth about the meaning of his life and his death. He does need to cut a long story short, he goes to the point: he speaks about life and death. And because it is about his life and death, it is also about their lives and deaths. The disciples are touched, not because Jesus' speech is a well-crafted piece of biblical exegesis but because they discern that what Jesus says is about them, about the meaning of their lives and deaths.

It seems to me that we are dealing here with a key issue for our Churches today. Too often, we manage to speak about God in a way which does not really connect with the real lives of our contemporaries. Jesus met the two disciples where they were, as they were. He began by listening to them, and the starting point of the dialogue was their feelings and questions.

Ultimately the high point of the story for Cleopas and his friend is the breaking of bread. Here again Jesus does not shy away from the truth. For those who have eyes to see, the broken bread, symbol of Jesus' brokenness on the Cross and ours, becomes a place of revelation, the very place where a real meeting can happen because all the participants see each other for who they truly are.

In the broken bread, the broken hopes of the two disciples, their sense of being lost and somewhat betrayed in their expectations are transfigured and given a new meaning.

Here Jesus' words in the Gospel reveal themselves particularly relevant: "The truth will make you free" (Jn 8:32). The two disciples were waiting for the political liberation of

their nation, but out of their dialogue with the Risen Lord, they experience a new kind of freedom: they are freed from false hopes, liberated from the deadly spiral of disappointment, despair and bitterness and given a new and solid hope: Christ himself whom they are called to herald to the world.

Like Cleopas and his friend, we have many reasons to be downcast, afraid, deeply challenged and worried by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The story of the two disciples shows us that we have to begin by being honest about our feelings, to share them with Christ, to invite him in so that he may be able to help us to channel them in a positive way. It is also necessary to face the truth of what we have to change in our societies, in our communities and in our personal lives in order to prevent another pandemic.

The freedom obtained for us by Christ is an invitation to hope that things can be different, that our world can function in a better way for the good of all.

At the moment, we could be tempted to remain paralysed by the fears and stress generated by the present situation; we could also be tempted to dream of a return to the so-called normality we knew before, as if nothing had happened, ignoring the lesson we must learn from that painful experience. Like the two disciples, we have to be open and truthful if we want something to change in our Churches and nations. Like the two disciples, we must consent to journey and work together so that, freed from despair and self-centredness, the change we long for may bring forth new life and new hope to all.

We cannot acquiesce to things as they are. As an Easter people, our hope has to be a resistance movement against fatalism. The hope that something else is possible should make us capable of treading new paths today and of being ready for fresh starts.

As Pope Francis declared last week: “Let us welcome this time of trial as an opportunity to prepare for our collective future, a future for all without discarding anyone. Because without an all-embracing vision, there will be no future for anyone” (19.04.2020).