

ENCOUNTERING JESUS IN TODAY'S WORLD

One of the stories that had a huge impact on me as a young seminarian was the story told by the Archbishop Ganaka of Jos at the time. According to him, there was a promising seminarian in his diocese and his attention was drawn to that seminarian due to the many good qualities in him. The seminarian was pleasant, highly disciplined, academically above average, related very well with people, and most importantly was spiritually sound. When that seminarian was ordained a deacon, a few parish priests campaigned to have him in their assistant priest because he was going to be an invaluable asset to them. After the deacon was ordained a priest, he was sent to one of the best parishes within the diocese and under a great priest to mentor him; however, after 2 years in the priesthood, the priest turned out to be a disaster because he had become an alcoholic and everything the bishop did to help him fell on deaf ears. To make matters worse, the priest loved disappearing from time to time without informing anyone of his whereabouts. One day, after he had disappeared for 2 weeks and later resurfaced, the Archbishop scolded him so terribly and told him he was going to send him back to his parents since he was of no-use to the Church. The priest listened attentively to the Archbishop and then told him – **MY LORD, I AM A SICKMAN**. The priest was sent to England and to the Servants of the Paraclete which had a centre for treating priests with personal difficulties. After 6 months in England, the priest came back totally transformed and after 6 years of being sober, he was sent to America where he specialised in the treatments of alcoholics and drug addicts. After his training in America, the priest went back to Nigeria and set-up a centre for the treatment of alcoholics and drug addicts. The centre has helped thousands of people and given them second chances in life. When the priest was asked what led to his personal transformation, he stated unequivocally that while he was a seminarian and being praised by everyone, he did not know himself and certainly did not know God; however, he was completely broken by alcohol and had no option but to run to Jesus for help. In his brokenness, Jesus encountered and touched him, and commissioned him to encounter and touch others who are broken like him. Yes, we can only know God if we have encountered Him, and we cannot encounter Him unless we have been broken ourselves as we experience in this Sunday's readings.

In this Sunday's Gospel passage from Luke Chapter 24, we are presented with the concluding sentence of the encounter between Jesus and the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus and Christ's encounter with the rest of His disciples. To understand this Gospel passage adequately, we need to remind ourselves of the mental state of the disciples after the death of Christ – **THEY WERE OVERCOME WITH FEAR!** They had hoped that Christ was the Messiah who would save them; however, with His brutal death and the fact His body was missing after three days, they were simply terrified and did not know where to turn to. In their brokenness, they invited Jesus to stay with them and they **RECOGNISED** Him at the breaking of bread. The Greek word used there for recognised

is *Ginosko* which means to know, perceive, or understand something or someone. However, *Ginosko* is not an intellectual knowledge; rather, it is an experiential knowledge, knowledge through active relationship with someone – A Personal and Profound Encounter with another person, which was the encounter the two disciples on the road to Emmaus had with Jesus. The other disciples who were in Jerusalem were equally overpowered by fear; the Gospel told us they were in a state of alarm and fright to the point that when Christ greeted them with His peace, they were still agitated with fear. However, to dissipate their fear, Christ encountered them personally and profoundly in three major ways:

1. **By Sight** – Look at my hands and feet and know it is I indeed.
2. **By Touch** – Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones.
3. **By Taste** – Have you anything here to eat? He ate a piece of grilled fish.

My friends, we cannot know God unless we have encountered Him, and we cannot encounter Him unless we have been broken ourselves and then equipped to encounter Him in our fellow brothers and sisters. It is important to note that so long as the disciples could control things themselves, there was no open door for Christ to encounter them; however, when they admitted their brokenness and helplessness, they opened-up to Christ and their fears evaporated. To encounter Jesus in today's world, we must follow the Pastoral Methodology of Jesus of encountering those who are broken by Sight, Touch and Taste. We encounter them by Sight when we notice Christ in our neighbours, managers, colleagues, and parishioners especially those who are struggling with one thing or the other. We encounter them by Touch when we reach out to them and are genuinely concerned about their situation instead of paying lip service to it while all along, we are not interested in them. We encounter them by Taste by giving them as much as we can or pointing them in the right direction where they would get the help they deserve. Yes, using our time, talents, and treasures, we encounter Christ who today resides in the lives of those around us and crying out to all of us to encounter Him. By so doing, we become witnesses to Christ Resurrection as we hear in today's First Reading from Acts of Apostles Chapter 3.

As the priest in the above story did and as St Teresa of Avila told us: **“Christ has no body but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes with which He looks compassion on this world, yours are the feet with which He walks to do good, yours are the hands, with which He blesses all the world. Yours are the hands, yours are the feet, yours are the eyes, you are His body. Christ has no body now but yours.”** By doing this, we obey God and His love comes to perfection in us as St John tells us in today's Second Reading.

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