Faculty and Staff Prayer Service for Mark Craddock

June 2, 2023

Mark would appreciate us reflecting upon the Risen Christ appearing to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus to put his death in proper perspective. The two disciples had been trying to make sense of Jesus' death, and I am sure they mirrored our feelings as we attempt to make sense of the news that Mark is no longer physically with us. Even though we knew this day would come, it still leaves us numb. That is because death is so real, final, and harsh that we can imagine it mocking or laughing at the prospect that there is anything more powerful.

This Gospel passage is one of the rare moments when we see that Jesus has a sense of humor. He pretends he is clueless about the events that had taken place in Jerusalem that refer to him and his suffering and death on a cross and rumors that he had risen from the dead. The disciples were despondent and perplexed by all of this. Yet, Jesus was having some fun with them, not in a mean way, but playfully, as in, "I know something you don't know." He then goes on to explain the Scriptures. "Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures." That was after he had chided them by saying, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!"

Notice that the risen Lord suddenly comes into their presence, joins their company, walks with them, and instructs them. He does not ask if he could accompany them. He acts as though he doesn't need their permission to walk with them. He didn't. It is reminiscent of when he stepped into Peter's boat and instructed him to push off into the water so that he could preach to the crowd. The boat stands for Peter's life, and Jesus enters into his life and tells him what to do without asking if he has his permission. Peter didn't protest. Why? Because Jesus spoke with authority as one who was his Lord. Peter intuited that in those early days of his getting to know Jesus. Later, in response to Jesus' question, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter would give the right answer without fully understanding why he would say such a thing, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (Mt. 16-13-20). It sounds more like a lucky guess. Jesus attributed this insight to a revelation from his heavenly Father and not deduced from human reasoning. Then Jesus instructed the two disciples on how the Scriptures explained all that had happened to him, still without revealing his true identity.

The Church understands that the resurrection appearances were Jesus' way of teaching the Church how to recognize his presence now that he will accompany us in Spirit. The Risen Christ continues to use the Scriptures and, in our context, to teach us how to make sense of Mark's death as he had gone about this for those two disciples. He doesn't ask our permission this morning to enter our lives, walk with us, and instruct us on how his resurrection impacts how we perceive death, our own, and others. He doesn't have to because he is our Lord.

Earlier, I had mentioned Jesus' sense of humor and his playfulness when he joined the company of these two disciples, devastated and despondent by all that had taken place. I think Mark would like us to rest with that thought. Jesus' sense of humor and playfulness hinted at a deeply rooted experience of joy that radiated from the depths of his being. The two disciples had yet to comprehend that death does not have the final word and the implications this shocking reality can have on us before we experience it "firsthand."

You and I know that Mark had a joyful and playful spirit about him. The words, "I am ready to go," displays confidence and joy at the prospect of his leaving this earth. Those who believe that this material world is all there is cannot overcome the cold and stark finality and harshness of death. The proper response is despair, not joy, no matter how optimistic or joyful is someone's personality.

Mark's natural joyful and playful spirit was intensified, transfigured by the joy that comes from believing all the Scriptures said about Christ, his Lord, and Savior. That is why Bishop Konzen, S.M. told the archbishop that Mark's attitude to his impending death was remarkable. He described Mark's faith as being on steroids, which generated a good-natured laugh. Faith in what the sacred Scripture has to say about Jesus allows us to be playful and even have a good laugh as we mourn Mark's passing to where we hope to follow. In Christ's resurrection, the last laugh does not belong to death but to Christ and to all who place their trust in him.

That is why Saint Thomas More could crack a joke with his executioner before he was unjustly hanged. He was laughing at death and in so doing, he was making one of the more eloquent professions of faith I have ever heard! That is why we can shed tears of sadness and tears of joy at the same time when we remember Mark. It is our way of laughing at death and making St. Thomas More's succinct but joyful profession of faith our own.

Mark believed that and did not want us to wallow in grief. It is true that sorrow still remains a reality. However, mixed in with the tears of sadness are also tears of joy. Like the two disciples of Jesus making their way to Emmaus, and like Mark, who has made his way to where we hope to follow, we place our trust in Jesus and these words of his: "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11; 17:13, 24–26).

Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.