

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

There's an old legend that tells the tale of a king who decided to honor the most valued person in his kingdom. After a thorough search of the entire kingdom, four finalists were selected by his courtiers and presented to the king. From them, the king would decide who was his most valued person in the whole kingdom.

The first person presented was a wealthy merchant who had given a great deal of his fortune to help the poor. The second was a celebrated doctor who had rendered faithful and dedicated service to the sick for many years. The third finalist was a distinguished judge who was appreciated for his wisdom, fairness, and brilliant decisions.

The fourth person presented was an elderly woman who appeared humble by her demeanor and even her dress. She hardly looked like someone who might be considered the most valued person in the whole kingdom. What could she have possibly accomplished? Still, there was something about her. She had a warm, welcoming face, understanding, even loving eyes, and a quiet, sure confidence in her bearing.

The king was intrigued, but somewhat puzzled by her presence. He asked who she was. The answer came: "You see the philanthropist, the doctor, and the judge? Well, she taught them all."

That woman had no wealth, no fortune, and no title, but she had unselfishly given her life to produce great people. Who could be of greater value in the whole kingdom? There is nothing more powerful or more Christ-like than sacrificial love.

At first glance, the king had not seen the value of this humble woman. He missed the significance of her contribution to his kingdom upon first sight.

We often do that as well. We miss the value of those around us. It seems to me that many of us would be surprised how often we miss the presence of Christ just as the young Cleopas and his young companion missed the significance of the stranger they encountered on the road to Emmaus.

Of all the Resurrection accounts in the Gospels, I love this encounter of the Risen Christ with these two young men on the road to Emmaus the best. In my reflection on this scene, it seems to me that they were young people because only the young can be so thoroughly disillusioned. As we get older, we tend to become more cynical, less enthusiastic, maybe even a little callous in our outlook. No, these were young people. You can hear it in the disappointment of their reply to the stranger, "...we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel..." They had placed all their hope, their dreams, and the commitment of their lives in this Jesus of Nazareth, and then he was killed and shown to be a mere mortal. He was no Messiah, no savior of their people.

Then, the Lord starts teaching from the Scriptures from the time of Moses and through all the prophets. As they listened hope was re-kindled in their hearts. They want to hear more. They want to believe what they are hearing. Luke tells us, “They urged him, ‘Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over’”. And so the stranger went home with them.

Then, it happened. “While he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from the sight.”

They knew what they saw. Rather, they knew who they saw. Their hearts were on fire again. It was him. He had risen! They couldn’t keep it to themselves. They set out, I am sure, running the seven miles back to Jerusalem. Finding the Apostles gathered together, they are told, I am sure, with awe and wonder, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then, breathless to be sure, they “recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

The significance of the Resurrection transformed those young men’s lives, as well as the lives of the Apostles. We gain an appreciation of how transformative the Resurrection was in their lives in our first reading today where Peter preaches so powerfully on the day of Pentecost that three thousand people were baptized and added that day. The significance of the Resurrection transformed those who encountered the Risen Christ from being disillusioned, depressed, cynical, and fearful people into people with the power to change thousands of lives.

We might ask ourselves today if we have allowed the significance of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ to transform our lives. I am told there is a tombstone in Scotland on which are carved these words about a man named Angus McDonald: “He was not a particularly religious man, but in all other respects he was an ideal churchman”.

I suspect that might be said of too many of us, “We are not particularly religious, but in all other respects we are ideal church members,” which is to say that we don’t allow our religion to interfere too much in our lives. We keep it a proper Sunday kind of thing.

Walter Elias had been born and raised in the city until his parents decided to give up city life and become farmers. Walter had a vivid imagination and the farm was the perfect place for a young boy and a wondering mind. One day walking through the apple orchard he was amazed when he saw sitting on a branch of one of the apple trees an owl. He remembered what his father had told him about owls. Owls slept during the day because they hunted throughout the night. He thought an owl might make a great pet. Walter crept toward the tree, reached up, and grabbed the owl by the legs. Suddenly, everything was utter chaos. The owl awakened, flapping its wings, feathers flew, and the owl screeched a terrible noise. Walter panicked. He threw the screeching owl to the

ground and stomped it to death. Realizing what he had done, Walter Elias cried his heart out. He ran back to the barn, got a shovel, and buried the owl in the orchard.

At night he would dream about that owl. As the years passed, he never got over that terrible day. It affected the rest of his life. As an older man he said he never, ever killed anything again. That event transformed Walter Elias' life. From the pit of despair, something rose up in his life that made Walter Elias Disney give life to thousands of animals in hundreds of delightful movies.

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ has the power to transform us, if we allow it to. It can move us from despair to new possibilities in life. It opens the blindness of our eyes to see Christ alive in everyday people in our lives. It causes us to repent of evil or hurtful things we have said or done that frees us to do great things with our lives or restore relationships that have been shattered. It sets our hearts on fire so that we can't keep it to ourselves and we have to share with others the love of Christ that has been revealed to us.

Please God, may not one of us wind up with the epitaph of Angus McDonald, "He or she was not a particularly religious person, but in all other respects he was an ideal church person." Rather, may our sharing in the bread that is broken today and the cup from which we drink so transform our lives as we encounter the Risen Christ.