

Archbishop Timothy P. Broglio, J.C.D.
MCCW Day of Reflection
26 April 2020



Dear Sisters in the MCCW world-wide,
Dear Brothers in Christ,

One of the benefits of these days of reduced travels and the elimination of outside activities has been an opportunity to order papers and photographs from my seven years in the Dominican Republic. When I was installed as the IV Archbishop for the Military Services in 2008, I began my first pastoral visit the next morning. My personal effects from the Dominican Republic came about two or three weeks later.

Many things were unpacked, books put on shelves, clothes in drawers, and so forth. However, documents, letters, and pictures were piled on a shelf until just after Easter Sunday, two weeks ago.

It has been great to relive memories, challenging to identify people in the pictures, and a reminder that this current ministry began with a jump start.

That is clearly the experience of the primitive Church. The Apostles and the pious women followed the itinerant preacher with various motivations. They were all attracted to His authoritative and innovative preaching. They saw the signs. Yet, despite His warnings, who was ready for the pascal triduum? Who understood completely? We continue to walk with Him on the journey of life and we seek to understand the Sacred Scriptures, to discover a new perspective, and to deepen our understanding of the Lord Jesus in our midst.

What do these splendid passages from the Word of God teach us?

The first lesson comes from the Gospel. The two disciples, perhaps even a couple, are fleeing Jerusalem, the center, and the community. They have heard about the crucifixion and even the first glimmers of the Resurrection. They are disillusioned. "We were hoping that He would be the one to redeem Israel..."

They had a clear idea about what the redemption of Israel was and it did not involve a cross. It would be a liberation from Roman rule, a return to the glory of Solomon, and even better heights.

How could they be so blind? After all, it was so clear. Is our vision any better?

Note well, however, that Jesus is with the disciples who journey to Emmaus. Even in our perplexity, even when we sin, Jesus is there; He listens. So important in these days of disease, death, anxiety, and separation is to know that the Lord walks with us.

We looked so forward to being together around the altar in San Antonio, but a pandemic got in the way. It would be tragic to lament the postponement of our gathering and miss the Lord's presence and His invitation right now to a deeper relationship with Him.

Many years ago Cardinal Ratzinger reminded us about love being a kind of death: "We die again and again in marriage, in the family, and in all our dealings with our fellow-men. The power of selfishness can be explained in the light of this experience. It is a flight—an all too understandable flight—from the mystery of death that is love. At the same time, however, it is only this death that is love which is really fruitful. Selfishness of the kind that seeks to avoid this death impoverishes and empties us. The grain of wheat must die if it is to bear fruit."¹ The "I" must die if it is to bear fruit.

We cannot demonize the two disciples en route to Emmaus, because the eleven were locked away in the Upper Room. Disillusionment, fear, and perplexity were their emotions, as well. The Resurrected Lord was at hand. Sisters and Brothers, He is always at hand.

I am sure that you did not miss His methodology in inducing conversion. What did He use? He explained the Sacred Scriptures to make the events clearer. They knew the Sacred Scriptures. They were pious Jews. However, they needed the proper lens, the correct interpretation to understand how defeat becomes victory; an empty tomb a sign of triumph and not consternation.

You know how much I have stressed the importance of formation for Catholics. You and I need the tools to ponder and grow in our faith. We have to learn and relearn how to listen and understand the way that the Lord speaks to us.

"We need help to see the events of our lives from God's perspective, as well....By properly understanding God's action in the life of Jesus we can correct our false assumptions and mistaken perspectives."²

We identify the sources of false beliefs and mistaken perspectives: secular culture, the loudest voice in the room, insufficient faith formation. Look back at the development of this pandemic: the first missed signs, initial beliefs, the fear, the talking heads, one day we heard this theory and the next day another. We look for solid ground.

¹ Joseph Ratzinger, *Seeking God's Face: Meditations for the Church Year*, pp. 34-5.

² Daniel Mueggenborg, *Come Follow Me*, Year A, p. 98

On the pilgrimage of faith, there is solid ground: the Bible, the Magisterium of the Church, the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, and lives of the saints. We heard in the first reading a sample of the impressive and dynamic preaching of Peter on Pentecost Sunday. Do not forget, this was the coward who denied that he knew the Christ fifty-two days earlier. Now completely influenced by the presence of the Holy Spirit, he is fearless. He will be crucified upside down in witness to the truth about Jesus Christ. That is why we are here.

Take advantage of this day of recollection to hear the voice of Jesus, to be moved by the preaching of Peter, and to remember that our liberation came not through corruptible valuables, but the precious Blood of the Lamb. "In the world there is suffering, there is sin; the work of Christ consists in making use of suffering to eliminate sin, and thereby eliminate the deepest cause of suffering."³

We saw that in the Eucharist the disciples' eyes were opened and they recognized the Christ. They changed the course of their journey and returned to the community. How we hunger for that Bread of Life. It grieves me that we are gathered around a camera to celebrate the central act of our faith, the source and summit of our lives as Catholics. There is not a celebration in this chapel where you are not in my thoughts and prayers.

I applaud all of the efforts that the chaplains and priests have employed to make the Mass, the Eucharistic Sacrifice, available to you. Would that it were possible to give you Holy Communion, as well. May a side-effect of the pandemic be an ever deeper appreciation of the importance of full, active participation in the Eucharist. A deeper knowledge and a more pressing hunger for the Mass and the sacraments will deepen our appreciation of their value and our need for the food for the journey.

We have all learned to die to self in these challenging days. My prayer is that you also grow in this important day of recollection and during the regional retreats, as well. Old pictures from other permanent stations bring back memories, urge us to pray for those God has brought into contact with us, and remind us that we have moved forward on the pilgrimage.

³ Vanhoye, *Le Letture bibliche delle Domeniche*, Anno A, p. 119.