



Archbishop of Montreal

Homilie
Sunday, April 26, 2020

Third Sunday of Easter - Year A (Lc 24, 13-35)

“Were not our hearts burning within us?”

“Were not our heart burning within us while we were on the road and he spoke to us and explained the Scriptures to us?”

Today we, too, are on a road. It is the road of our life’s journey, the road of human history, our personal history, and the history of our society. On all these roads, Jesus comes to meet us. Jesus comes to walk with us and talk to us. Do we take the time to listen? Do we let ourselves listen to God?

In general, when one approaches the theme of prayer, it is not unusual to hear the following question: “What is prayer really at the deepest level?” The answer given to this very legitimate question is that praying is to speak with God, to petition God, to praise God, and, again, to speak with God.

But we know in the depth of our hearts that to pray is not only talking to God, but also listening to God. God speaks to us. One could even say that the beginning of prayer is not to speak, but to listen!

Praying is opening our hearts to God who speaks to us. By becoming listeners to the Word of God in scripture, we learn to pray. By entering into the Word of God, we can respond to God who speaks to us through the scriptures.

In prayer, we can make requests to God. Jesus himself told us to pray in this way, “Ask and it will be given to you.” We can petition God, even with tenacity and perseverance. But at the same time, He invites us to listen to his Word, the Word of God.

What is the Bible? We know that the Bible, Holy Scripture, is the Word of God. The Bible is the Word of God! Jesus Christ is the Word of God made flesh, the incarnate Word of God and the Word of God in its fullness. Drawing from the source of the Word of God, from Holy Scripture, is a means that God gave us to speak to us directly.

Sometimes, when we read the Bible, we are looking for an answer to a specific question that is on our mind. Maybe we are looking for a specific passage that fits our situation, in this moment in life.

Perhaps we find it difficult to forgive and we look for scripture passages in which Jesus speaks of forgiveness or a Bible story that has forgiveness as its theme. Perhaps we long to be able to pray and we look for passages that speak of prayer.

But you can also simply open the Bible, not knowing what to look for, not knowing what to ask from God. You are not sure how to say what it is that you seek, but you can simply open the

Bible and read! Even if you do not know on which page to start, just open the Bible somewhere and start reading.

As we read the Bible, Jesus answers, and he speaks to us. He speaks to us in the concrete situation that we are in. Even when we do not know where to begin, Jesus knows where we are. He knows where we find ourselves and he knows how to meet us there. He knows how to reach us, wherever we are.

Therefore, open the Bible and read it. Read it, even if only for the sake of having done so! Read it, just so that you can say, "I read the Bible!" Today, I want to add something else to the simple fact of reading the Bible, which is the importance of not merely reading the Bible but praying the Bible! But what is this? What does it mean to pray the Bible? How do we do this?

The answer is easy enough. To pray the Bible is to take the time to read it slowly, very slowly. You could say that reading in this way is to ruminate the Word of God. You read a page, maybe a paragraph. It is not about how much you read, but you how read. You read a short passage, and then you read it again. And then you read it another time, calmly.

Perhaps, the first time, nothing caught our attention, nothing was particularly interesting, no, "Ah, that's just what I was looking for."

But when we do not find it at the first attempt, then we calmly read it again. Again, and again we read it, slowly, gently. Suddenly, a word touches us in a special way and we read the passage again, twice, thrice, or maybe four times. Eventually, we continue with another passage.

We make the experience that by reading the Bible very slowly in this way, passage after passage, our heart opens and is touched by God whose Word speaks to us. It is the Word that enlightens us, pacifies us, strengthens us. It is God who pacifies us, enlightens us and guides us through his Word. Reading the Bible is worth the effort.

In life, we sometimes know what we are looking for and we look for it. In this case, when opening the Bible, we go right away to what we are looking for.

But at other times in life, we are searching for something that we cannot easily put into words. Maybe it is the meaning in your life that you are looking for, but you do not know where to look for it. Today, getting through the ordeal of the pandemic is the big question, but we do not know exactly what this means for us.

Think, for example, of needing something for your home, without knowing exactly what it is. You do not know exactly how it might help you as you walk down the aisles of the store. Suddenly, you see something and think, "Ah, that's what I was looking for!"

Perhaps you look for an interesting book, something that will capture your attention. You do not yet know the title, you do not yet know the author, but you browse through the books in the library or the bookstore or even the internet. Then comes the moment when you see the right title: "Ah, that's what I was looking for!"

It is the same with the Word of God. Sometimes we know what we are looking for but at other times, we are groping, looking somewhat vaguely, usually not quite sure what exactly we are looking for. But God knows what we need. He knows what we need. At some point, you will come across a word and say, "Ah, this is what I was looking for! Thank you, Lord."

We cannot open the Bible and read it slowly and ruminate over it and slowly reread it several times for a while without God giving us an answer, without God speaking to us. God speaks to us through his Word.

When reading the Bible, we are not reading as if we were reading a mere history book, a book about nothing more than historical events. We are not reading to find out what happened two or three thousand years ago.

When we read the Bible, be attentive to hearing God is speaking to us, reaching us today, in our time. God uses the Word of God, Holy Scripture, to meet us in our daily life. It certainly is a text written a long time ago, but it speaks to us today, in the situations in which we live right now.

Take the Psalms for example! The prayers of the Psalms speak of all the important emotions and situations in life that you can imagine! The Psalms speak of joy, sorrow, loneliness, community, trials, resurrection, reunion, overwhelming and incomprehensible suffering, joy gladdening the heart, prayer with God, being abandoned by God, finding God, finding others, being separated from others. All this, you will find in the Psalms!

Go to the Psalms and see for yourself. Open the Bible. Read the Bible.

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the Scriptures to us?”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Christian Lépine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

† Christian Lépine
Archbishop of Montreal