



Easter 2

THE NEW SHOFAR

He who has spurned the apostolic tradition and darted off to the opinions of heretical men—he has ceased to be a man of God and ceased to remain faithful to the Lord...St Clement (150-215 AD)

“They” devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship...

Who is the “they” here? Luke uses two significant ways of speaking about the Church in Acts, both of which are essential for our own understanding of “Church”. The main word is *ecclesia* and in Christian theology it refers to both: **(1)** a particular body of faithful people (eg. the ecclesia in the parish of St John’s) and **(2)** the whole body of the faithful (the universal ecclesia made up of Christians all around the world).

The Latin word *ecclesia*, is a compound word of two parts: “*ek*”, a preposition meaning “*out of*”, and a verb, “*kaleo*”, meaning “*to call*” - together, literally, “*to call out*”. That usage soon disappeared and was replaced with words meaning out of the world to be an *assembly, congregation of people* called together for a purpose.

Here is an important addition to this. When we are speaking of the whole body of Christian faithful, then there are included not only the members of the Church who are alive on earth but all who were members of the church before. Some churches therefore describe the Church as being composed of the *Church Militant* (Christians on Earth) and the *Church Triumphant* (Christians in Heaven). The Christian family, the most basic unit of Church life, is sometimes called the domestic Church.

Why is it important to understand meaning of Church?

This background becomes important when we talk about ourselves as “being the Church”, the Body of Christ. Luke sets down for us the divine expectations of those who gather in the name of Jesus the Risen Christ. Remember, this is not long after the death of Jesus on the cross. The shared memory of him was strong and the joy of the resurrection would have been a powerful driver in them seeking to keep his mission alive...*you are my witnesses in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, even to the end of the earth.*

How were they to carry out this ongoing mission? Once again, Luke helps us out here by setting down the daily way of living of that first community in Jerusalem. Note how high the bar has been set, not that the “height” is a problem as this is after Pentecost. All they do, all they are, all they have comes with the power of the Holy Spirit within them. Paul understands this and he celebrates this truth with the Galatians (**2:20**...

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

There is only one way this Kingdom living can become a reality in their lives, in our lives:

- *They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching (what Jesus taught them)*
- *and fellowship (mutual responsibility for each other)*
- *to the breaking of bread (the Eucharist, Holy Communion)*
- *and the prayers (the psalms, traditional Jewish prayers and Christian prayers)*

They recognised him in the breaking of the bread

It is important for Luke that his fellow believers understand how this following of Jesus is a lifestyle, a way of being in the world. It is a moment by moment existence, a human encounter by human encounter engagement, a complete and total way of living. He expresses this in his choice of Greek verbs – *they devoted themselves*. This is used in the sense of a continuous, persistent tenacity in living these things. Christians could not drift in and out of being followers (disciples) of Christ Jesus. This is the sense behind our baptism and our Easter baptismal renewal. There can be no lukewarm Christians. Only Christians.

Like many of us today, those disciples on the road to Emmaus were at a loss and in despair over a world seemingly gone mad, seeing the foundational principles of the world around them being shaken and living in fear for their own lives. The horror and shock of the Crucifixion had overwhelmed all hope and threatened the teachings of love and compassion Jesus had sought to instill. Is that not where we find ourselves today? Do the teachings of love seem pointless in the face of war, atrocities, global warming, racial hatred, refugee crises, and so many other evils? Wherever we are today, we are on that same road to our own Emmaus.

Something happens on this road.

Christ joins the disciples, walks beside them, breaks bread with them, and opens their hearts with his Word in a way that is so overwhelming, the world no longer seems hopeless to them. **Note** the world situation has not changed at all, but the hearts of the disciples have. For any Christian, for anyone who professes belief in the Resurrection and the teachings of Jesus, our hearts can feel overwhelmed by this same interaction with God on our own roads to Emmaus. Christ walks beside us today. Christ breaks bread with us today. Christ opens our hearts with his Word today in exactly the same way he did on that road to Emmaus 2,000 years ago. His teachings are the same: Love God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. Love your neighbour, and pray for your enemies. Forgive all. Welcome the stranger. Care for the sick. Visit the imprisoned. Provide for the least among us. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.

Nothing has changed, except now we are the ones walking the road.

This encounter on the road so turned the hearts of the disciples that they literally turned around and ran back into the fray, back into Jerusalem, back into the world. So must we allow our encounter with Christ in others, in prayer, in the Eucharist, and in the Word to turn our hearts around. We must allow ourselves to be so overwhelmed by the revelation of a God of love, that no fear, no evil, no suffering, and no hatred can leave us in despair.

The choice is ours. We can continue on our road to Emmaus and stay there. Safe. But continue to live in despair, confusion, instability, and fear. Continue to live in a world where evil has the last word and death is the end of life. Or we can listen for that Word, hear that Voice, and be overwhelmed by Love. Go back to “Jerusalem” back to healing, back to a life

of hope, and back to a world where love has the last word and life never ends. Even if it kills us.