

# “Walking Together .... ....Celebrating Christ Risen!”

## A Prayer Resource

From our Chaplain Fr. Dave Austin OSA

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Dear Friends,

In this Easter Season, the liturgy, Scripture readings and prayer reflections expose us to the fresh joy of the Resurrection of Jesus. The Gospels and readings from Acts in particular record the early steps towards faith in Jesus and the unfolding story of the Early Christian Community that inspired St Augustine to form such communities as he and his companions grew into their faith.

Our theme of *‘Walking Together...’* remains our focus but seen from some other angles in this post-Resurrection period. Many friends of Jesus walked to the tomb... some even ran! Their faith experiences varied as the seeds of belief began to emerge in the lives of individuals and the community. My focus in this reflection is on Jesus’ walking together with the disciples on the road to Emmaus – actually a prayer journey for both the disciples and Jesus, and one that fascinated St Augustine.

A small digression... when I began my studies in philosophy at St Mary’s Hall on the campus of Villanova University in 1964, the US\$6m seminary was brand new. Tiled mosaics of spiritual and historical relevance adorned the walls. In the dining room was one of Jesus and the 2 disciples at Emmaus with the caption in Latin, *‘Cognoverunt eum in fractione panis!’* – in English, *‘They recognised him in the breaking of the bread!’*

Seminary life being rather inward-looking at times, it may not surprise you to hear of the day that one of the seminarians stuck a cutout of a Weeties box on the mosaic and a teabag protruding from the chalice! Perhaps a more playful than sacrilegious act but an unusual reminder of the presence of Jesus at every moment, in every place and personal encounter. I often remind newly married couples of this daily presence of Jesus at the breakfast table – where ‘love of neighbour’ is lived out - *‘Walking Together!’*

The Emmaus story reminds me too of the spectators leaving Brookvale Oval early when their team was losing – usually Parramatta in the 1990s – not just ‘walking together’ but ‘fleeing together’! These disciples did just that – heading home to Emmaus after all they had hoped for had failed, their dreams shattered. They had witnessed Jesus’ horrible death and they are traumatised - life has lost its meaning.

Like some of the other Gospel accounts of the Resurrection, the Emmaus Story is understated – nothing showy from the disciples or Jesus – simply *‘Walking Together!’* The disciples are wary of change and on the verge of locking everything up and freezing the present – like us sometimes. They are prone to ‘slowness of heart’, aware of the Easter proclamation but resistant to it, yet as we listen, we hear the stages or marks of an authentic journey to spiritual insight and faith – familiar elements in the life of St Augustine too.

Those who study Augustine closely often choose the ***‘Walking Together!’*** theme. I recently had the good fortune of coming across a book by James K A Smith – On the Road With Saint Augustine – with the challenging sub-title, *‘A Real-World Spirituality for Restless Hearts’*. Smith describes his book this way: *‘This is not a biography. This is not a book about Augustine. In a way, it’s a book Augustine has written about you. It’s a journey with Augustine as a journey into oneself. It’s a travelogue of the heart. It’s a road trip with a prodigal who’s already been where you think you need to go’* (p xi).

The spirituality of Augustine is often described as a ‘window’ on the Gospel or a ‘mirror’ in which we see life and faith in fresh ways and grow in understanding of Jesus and ourselves. In many respects, we recognise ourselves in the Gospels – certainly in the Emmaus story, a place most of us need to go, in the gentle company of Jesus - ***‘Walking Together!’***

The disciples who felt all is lost asked Jesus, *‘Stay with us!’* – and he did for a while – then their eyes were opened and they recognised him *‘in the breaking of the bread’* – that simplest of everyday events. *‘Stay with us!’* – the prayer of many who don’t want to lose a loved one or things to change.

This Emmaus story is about our prayer journey – prayer is often the search for the insight to look at the same facts in a different light and see things in a new way. St Augustine has a remarkable ability to break open our faith in simple ways and so I share the following commentary and wisdom from Augustine’s Sermons in the hope that they might enhance your experience of Jesus’ presence in both daily life and Eucharist - ***‘Walking Together!’***

**Sermon 232,7,7** - ‘When we believe, we have Christ with us. The disciples at Emmaus had Christ with them during the meal. We have him with us in our hearts. It means more to have Christ with one in one’s heart than to be in the same building with him.’

**Sermon 228B,3** - To be present at the Eucharist and to be unaware of this intimate connection between what happens there and our own identity as the body of Christ, would be like being on the road to Emmaus, unaware of the one walking the road with us. If we truly believe, we must have Christ with us in our hearts. In that case our lives are open to transformation:

‘Just as this (the body and blood of Christ) turns into you when you eat and drink it, so you for your part turn into the body of Christ when you live devout and obedient lives.’

**Sermon 272** - Augustine was always concerned for unity in the Church of his time. At the heart of this concern was the celebration of the Eucharist. He was at pains to highlight the link between what happens on the altar and what should be happening in those celebrating the Eucharist. It was not just a matter of what was on the altar as with the hearts of those around the altar. They had to understand that they were the body of Christ (see 1 Cor 12:12), receiving Christ’s body:

‘Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it’ (1 Cor 12:27). If that is so, it is the sacrament of yourselves that you receive... You hear the words, ‘the body of Christ’ and you reply ‘Amen’. Be then a member of Christ’s body, so that your ‘Amen’ may accord with the truth... Be then what you see, and receive what you are.’