

Wednesday in Easter Week

April 7, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Acts 3:1–10; Psalm 105:1–8; Psalm 118:24; Psalm 118:24; Luke 24:13–35

Since coming to Saint Mary’s, one of my favorite services has been Easter Day Evensong & Benediction. The second lesson for Evening Prayer is from John’s gospel—Jesus’ appearance to his disciples on the evening of the day of resurrection. The evangelist wrote: “On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”¹

Today’s gospel lesson is the Scripture we read at Benediction when the Eucharistic Bread has been placed in the monstrance, and we have the chance to meditate on Christ’s presence among us. This is a literal translation from the Bible Hub website. It’s called the Berean Literal Bible—its purpose is to render Hebrew and Greek into the most intelligible English while conveying the original languages’ grammar and meaning. Here are two key verses: “And it came to pass in his reclining with them, having taken the bread, he blessed; and having broken, he began giving to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him. And he being seen, vanished from them.”²

This is the following verse: “And they said to one another, ‘Was not our heart burning within us as he was speaking with us on the road, as he was opening the Scriptures to us?’”³ Then they were on their way back to Jerusalem—not to Galilee, as in Mark, Matthew, and John.

When I was a curate in Baton Rouge, I met Patrick Regan, a liturgical scholar, when he was abbot of Saint Joseph’s Abbey in Louisiana. In 2001,

¹ John 20:19.

² Luke 24:30–31. Translation: <https://www.gotquestions.org/Berean-Study-Bible-BSB.html>, (accessed 7 April 2021).

³ Luke 24:32. Ibid.

he retired and accepted a position to teach at the Pontifical Institute of Liturgy at Sant' Anselmo, the Benedictine university in Rome. He returned to his abbey in 2013 after being diagnosed with leukemia. He died on February 8, 2017.

In Rome, he wrote about, among other things, the revised rites of Holy Week and Easter of the Roman Catholic Church. In 2007, *Worship*, a liturgical journal published by Saint John's Abbey and University in Collegeville, Minnesota, his article "The Good Friday Communion Debate" set me on a new path of study, not just about the services of Holy Week—who knew the Roman Church internally was having a debate about whether the faithful should receive the Eucharist on Good Friday—they've continued to do so—but fresh look at what we know about the development of the Eucharist in the early Christian communities of the first centuries.

These are Regan's words that grabbed my attention most of all: it's the third of the four reasons he concludes that the people of God should receive on Good Friday: "Good Friday communion represents the stubborn [enduring]⁴ and official recognition on this one day of a stream of primitive tradition focused more on what Paul Bradshaw calls 'feeding on the life-giving Jesus' than on celebrating the holy sacrifice. 'This dominant emphasis,' [Bradshaw wrote], 'explains why the reception of communion in separation from the eucharistic action proper. . . emerged so soon in the life of the church and became so widely established: (the faithful) needed, not to celebrate the eucharist often, but to feed on Christ all the time.'"⁵ And that is what we are gathered to do today.

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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⁴ Regan's word here is "perdurance."

⁵ Paul F. Bradshaw, "The Eucharistic Sayings of Jesus," *Studia Liturgica* 35 (2005), 1–11.