



## The Parish Churches of S Philip and S Augustine and S Matthew with S Mary the Virgin Newcastle

### Homily for Easter III (19<sup>th</sup> April) 2026

The narrative of the encounter of Cleopas and his companion with the risen Christ, which comprised this morning's Gospel proclamation is often described with the title of either *The Road to Emmaus* or, alternatively, *The Meal at Emmaus*. However, the use of either of these designations of the account risks obscuring one of the important points that we should take from it: namely, that the journey and the repast are integrally connected and that neither takes precedence over the other.

To understand this, we need to grasp the key aspects of each of the parts: the expounding of Holy Scripture along the Road and the Eucharistic character of the Meal. In each of these two parts, Cleopas and his companion felt the risen Presence of Christ - first as the Scriptures spoke to them through the words of the Stranger and secondly in the Breaking of Bread - the Eucharistic meal. These are more than complimentary experiences. Rather they assert the integrity of what today we would term Word and Sacrament.

At various points in the history of the Church, it has been suggested by some that one or other enjoys a significant priority over the other. Our minds might move to Martin Luther's *Sola Scriptura* and its insistence on the Christian life governed by the texts of Holy Writ alone; but for much of the history of the Church, the general knowledge of Scripture was rather poor and for many Christians, corporate religious practice inhered mainly in attending the Mass with its readings in what was for many impenetrable Latin and sermons, which though doubtless very interesting, often did little to elucidate the texts of the day. It is unlikely that many felt the same sensation in the Presence of Holy Scripture that they did as they gazed upon the Sacrament.

Yet, as I say, it is an error to split Holy Scripture from the Holy Mass or even subordinate one from the other. Of course, there are those who argue that Scripture must be more important, because it is thence that we derive the mandate to celebrate the Eucharist; but that is not correct: as we learn from the Epistles of Saint Paul - the earliest literature of the New Testament - Christians were celebrating the Mass before any of the New Testament documents were written - and it had its own origin straight from the Lord and was not mediated by any ecclesiastical instrument.

The Mass is never celebrated without at least one and usually two or three readings from the Bible. There are, of course, many services, which do not culminate in the celebration of the Eucharist; but in well-ordered Liturgical communities, these are undertaken in the ambit of the Altar when the Mass is celebrated, demonstrating their integral connexion with it.

As the experience of Cleopas and his companion underlines, it is the same Word that speaks through the texts of Holy Scripture, Whom we encounter in the Real Presence of the Sacrament; and whilst, for most perhaps, some familiarity with the texts of the New Testament are necessary to perceive this Presence under the veil of bread and wine, equally, it is that Presence, communicating the divine Grace, which enables us to journey more deeply into the meaning of those texts and find more than the surface meaning of the words.

As the narrative implies, whilst Cleopas and his companion felt the Presence of Christ as He expounded the Scriptures to them and their hearts burned within them; but it was only in the Breaking of Bread that they recognised Him for Whom He is. Just as the road led to Emmaus, so the Scriptures lead us to the Mass; and without the Mass the potential of the Biblical texts properly to guide and strengthen our faith remains unfulfilled, because, as Saint Paul told the Greeks in Athens, it is in the risen Christ, Whose intense Presence we encounter in the Mass., that we live and move and have our being.