

## **Sacred Heart Novena** *Gardiner Street (9)*

A heart in pilgrimage

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### **Introduction**

A warm welcome to the closing evening of our nine days' prayer. Yesterday, we marked the death of Jesus – Good Friday – under the title of “a trusting heart”, Jesus's heart and our own. This evening, entitled “a heart in pilgrimage,” we turn towards Easter and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, the first fruits of all who have fallen asleep, the ground of our hope.

### **Topic**

It is good to ask myself, ourselves, how did I manage to come to Easter faith, personally, deeply, joyfully?

### **Arguments**

**1.** A practical first step would be to recognise that, somehow, not everyone makes the journey to Easter faith. We know this from our own families. Brothers and sisters, brought up in the same household, with the very same impulse of faith, don't always seem to have the same experience or arrive at the same reality of believing. Staying within families, we all know how challenging it is to share our deepest convictions with our nearest and nearest. In particular, the common experience of not handing on faith to our children is a source of pain. Given such unpredictable outcomes, we may well wonder, with humility and gratitude, how it is we got there ourselves at all?

**2.** The Gospel just read can help us a great deal. By means of the story of the disciples on the road, Luke draws our attention to essential features of the coming to faith. In the limited time available, I limit myself to the three outstanding marks: hunger, desire and belonging.

**a.** The poignant phrase “we had hoped” points to deep hungers of the heart. The experience of life, love and loss throws up all sorts of questions about the why and the wherefore of existence. Currently, we live in a culture of distraction, which tends to numb these deeper stirrings, but they have a way of coming back.

**b.** Desire might seem a strange “ingredient”! You will have noticed at the start of the story, Jesus stops the disciples: “they stood still, looking sad.” At the the other end of the story, they stop Jesus with the words, “stay with us Lord.” They have had their inkling of something more, their moment of epiphany. It will remain only potential unless they choose to have this Jesus in their lives. For this this is very heart of the Emmaus story: they affirm their desire and name it.

**c.** Thirdly, when they get back to Jerusalem, their story is strengthened and confirmed by a different story: the Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon. A great benefit of belonging to a faith community is that you can bring along your experience for confirmation and discernment. I could not imagine being a Christian on my own. What I have was carried by the generations before me. What I have I celebrate and live with my own community of faith. Some fundamental belonging is at the heart of being a believer.

**3.** The phrase “weren’t our hearts burning within us” is really an echo of the phrase we heard on the very first night of the novena: “these words are fulfilled in your hearing.” Something has woken up for the disciples – a special intensity of awareness and presence, mediated by the word. The next phrase is a surprise: “weren’t our hearts burning within us, when he spoke to us on the road, when he opened the scriptures for us.” We might have expected, when he broke the bread, but no, “when he opened the scriptures for us.”

It is always worth affirming that the risen Christ is present always everywhere fully to everyone. The Scriptures themselves are a place of encounter. In the course of this C-19 crisis, we have not been able to meet together, but we do have the Word of God with us at all times. This presence is mediated or disclosed in different ways: through love, nature, service, sacrament and Scripture. To put it oddly, we do not receive less of Christ in the different disclosures, but the same, one risen Jesus, because the risen Lord is present always everywhere fully to everyone.

The heart in pilgrimage is not alone: Christ is with us, we walk in the company of fellow believers, the sacraments nourish us and the word of God is a lamp for our steps.

### **Conclusion**

I hope Luke has been a good companion to you all in these days of prayer and reflection. He teaches us how to listen, to be compassionate, to pray, to see God in nature. He invites us to an openness to the presence of God, while we acknowledge our own divided hearts. Finally, he invites us to thanksgiving and to trust. He really is a good companion and guide.

I would like to draw these reflections to a close using a Contemporary Creed from the Methodist tradition, which captures much of what I would like to say:

We believe in God the Father, infinite in wisdom, power and love, whose mercy is over all his works, and whose will is ever directed to his children’s good.

We believe in Jesus Christ, Son of God and Son of man, the gift of the Father’s unfailing grace, the ground of our hope, and the promise of our deliverance from sin and death.

We believe in the Holy Spirit as the divine presence in our lives, whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ, and find strength and help in time of need.

We believe that this faith should manifest itself in the service of love as set forth in the example of our blessed Lord, to the end that the kingdom of God may come upon the earth. Amen.