

3rd Sunday of Easter – A

(Sat Apr 29: 4:30 p.m. St. Martha, Sun Apr 30: 11 a.m. St. Louis)

Sometimes Jesus can be invisible in plain sight. Kevin Bacon's face is everywhere, appearing in numerous movies, TV shows and commercials. There is even a popular game known as "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon." The game is based on the theory that anyone on earth can be connected to any person on the planet through a chain of acquaintances that has no more than five intermediaries. In the case of the Kevin Bacon game, one player names an actor and the other person attempts to make a connection in six moves, through actors who have acted with that one actor, with Kevin Bacon. Though Kevin Bacon is almost instantly recognizable, there was a time he worked with a makeup artist who created a prosthetic that made very subtle changes to Bacon's face. Suddenly he was able to walk around Los Angeles without being recognized. He didn't like it. He said, "People kind of looked right through me and weren't very nice to me." He said that because of his fame he was used to being treated well, and suddenly he was no longer getting those positive stokes."

Most of us are not as famous as Kevin Bacon but we may have had a similar experience. If you've ever worn a uniform for your job then some people will not recognize you "out of uniform." Let me tell you how true that is for me as a priest. (My first anointing in a hospital) Sometimes when people do recognize me out of uniform they look rather shocked. I don't wear my collar to bed. Out of uniform you can lose the connection you might have had with people.

Today's gospel tells us of an incident following Jesus' crucifixion. It happened on Easter morning. Two of Jesus' disciples were walking home to the town of Emmaus when the risen Christ starts walking along with them. There was probably

only one degree of separation, but they don't recognize him. They were walking home from the crucifixion. Why didn't they recognize him? After Jesus has departed from them on the walk, it starts to dawn on them, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" So what did they miss?

These disciples did do a few things right which led them to recognize Jesus eventually. The first thing they did was to widen their circle to include this outsider. Although they don't know who Jesus is they include him in their conversation. They talk to Jesus about the circumstances of his own death, the vision of angels and the empty tomb, but still don't recognize *him*?

In the story "Silver Blaze" Sherlock Holmes solves a crime which took place in a horse paddock. He recalls for the detectives the incident of a dog in the night time." The detective protests, "but the dog did nothing." Holmes replies, "That was the curious incident. The dog did nothing. Had a stranger entered the paddock the dog would have barked, but it didn't. Therefore the suspect had to have been someone known to the dog. That drastically cuts down on the number of suspects." In the story on the road to Emmaus, what was the "curious thing" the disciples overlooked? It was the witness of the women to the resurrection. Women in those days were not considered trustworthy witnesses. God must not have agreed because in all four gospels, the first people to carry the news of the empty tomb were women. Were the disciples blinded by their preconceptions? If these disciples rejected the testimony of women they were not prepared to see Jesus, even though the fact of Jesus resurrection was staring them right in the face. Despite their blindness in this regard, Jesus explain to those disciples the other clues they should have gotten – those passages in the Law and the Prophets that pointed to Christ who is a suffering servant.

This story ends happily because the two disciples do the right thing through their hospitality. Jesus, who is the guest here was expected by the custom of the day not to eat with them until he was strongly urged to stay. The disciples and Jesus, who to this day does not force himself on us, took over the role of host giving thanks and breaking bread. In doing this it was as if he had put back on the nurse's scrubs or the police uniform and becomes recognizable. Finally, they recognize Jesus!

We recognize Jesus in the same way – in the breaking of bread – in the Eucharist, and in the hospitality we offer each other, listening to the stranger in our midst, and listening to each other, as the disciples offered hospitality to Jesus. After meeting Jesus on the road the disciples turn around and go back to Jerusalem. Perhaps we need to turn around and change plans, too.