

On New Year's Day, 1929, Georgia Tech played UCLA in the Rose Bowl. In that game a young man named Roy Riegels recovered a fumble for UCLA. Picking up the loose ball, he lost his sense of direction and ran sixty-five yards toward the wrong goal line. One of his teammates, Benny Lom, ran him down and tackled him just before he reached the end zone. The Bruins were forced to punt. Tech blocked the kick and scored a safety, demoralizing the UCLA team. The strange play came in the first half. At halftime the UCLA players filed off the field and into the dressing room. They sat around on benches and the floor. But Riegels put a blanket around his shoulders, sat down in a corner, and put his face in his hands. A football coach usually has a great deal to say to his team during halftime. That day Coach Price was quiet. No doubt he was trying to decide what to do with Riegels. When the timekeeper came in and announced that there were three minutes before playing time, Coach Price looked at the team and said, "Men, the same team that played the first half will start the second." The players got up and started out, all but Riegels. He didn't budge. The coach looked back and called to him. Riegels didn't move. Coach Price went over to where Riegels sat and said, "Roy, didn't you hear me? The same team that played the first half will start the second." Roy Riegels looked up, his cheeks wet with tears. "Coach," he said, "I can't do it. I've ruined you. I've ruined the university's reputation. I've ruined myself. I can't face that crowd out there." Coach Price reached out, put his hands on Riegels' shoulder, and said, "Roy, get up and go on back. The game is only half over."

Now I know what you're thinking, Deacon Corey, what does that have to do with the reading or what we're doing today? I want you to think about it this way...those two disciples were like Roy Riegels; they were travelling in the wrong direction; they had fumbled in what they were doing and were running the wrong way from Jerusalem to Emmaus. In their mind, the game and their life were over and they were part of the reason things had gone wrong. So, imagine their surprise when Jesus told them that the same team of disciples who had fled from the cross, who had denied Jesus, who had gone into hiding because of their own fear would be the same team of disciples Jesus was asking and expecting to spread His message. Jesus was letting them know that there was a tomorrow, that there was hope and that there was a reason to have faith.

Our Scripture lessons for today have one common, encouraging theme: No matter what happens in our lives, the risen Jesus is always with us. God is always near to those who seek Him and who want to live in His presence, doing His will. But how many of us are in a position right now of not recognizing Jesus in our lives? How many of us are walking on the road to Emmaus like the disciples, focusing on all of the negative and not recognizing the hope we should have? The men on the road had been disciples of Jesus, they had heard his message, they heard him speak about the love we need to extend to others and all of his teachings. They had witnessed His deeds and may have been present during some of his healings. They were very likely present when Jesus multiplied the bread and fish for thousands. Then Jesus was arrested, scourged and crucified...and the world they knew fell apart.

This directly relates to us in several ways today. So many of us are caught right now in a cycle of worry and frustration. Our lives were moving along, most were likely content and everything

seemed to be going fairly smoothly, then real difficulties started. Covid-19 takes hold and begins to affect our health, our finances, our security, our children, our elderly, our sick and at risk and our feeling of security.

When things like this happen, it is normal for us to ask questions such as “Why, why did this happen?” and “Where were you? Where were you God? We become so blind with frustration, fear and worry that we don’t see what is happening right in front of us; just like the disciples on the road. If we take the moment to look around, to look for Christ, we will see that he has been here all the time. I’ve seen Him every day in the medical personnel working constantly to help those suffering, I’ve seen him every day in the workers that are risking their own health to provide the goods and services we need. I’ve seen him every day in the people, many of our parishioners included, that call and check on each other to see if there’s anything they can do to help. So where is God during all of this? He is right here; He is everywhere around us and He is working through us. All people that are living out the teachings and workings of Christ and are spreading his message are essential workers.

We are currently in this important time in our lives, and no matter how much we’re tired of being part of history, it is our calling right now. We must remember that through everything, just as we learned in our readings, God is here, walking with us and guiding us each step of the way. Anytime you feel frustration, fear or hopelessness, look for the helpers. I can assure you that you will always find them and in them you will always find God. Don’t be downtrodden like the disciples, Roy Riegels or the many in our world today. Know that we are doing nothing more than starting another part of this challenge and that Jesus is looking for us to continue spreading His message, be joyful and have confidence that He is with us.

Stay strong, have faith, be healthy and know that we miss seeing you each week and look forward to the day when we can all be together again. Until then, I’ll continue to look for you and hope to see you among the helpers, living out the teachings of our risen Lord.