

Unlike the last two sermons that touched on SORROW and SCRIPTURE, today’s sermon is about promise and fulfillment. That is, we all wonder if the central promise of the story will be fulfilled by the end of the story—making Luke 24 much more than an ordinary story, but rather SACRED HISTORY. To confirm the SACRED HISTORY, Jesus spoke these four critical words: *Everything must be fulfilled!* There is also a question that arises from our reading of Luke 24. “How do we know the truth of the Easter message?” God’s intervention in this dark world through Jesus the Son marks the truth that God is with us—always. The kingdom of his love and peace is here *because* Jesus came and he died and he rose again. This is the basic claim of Christianity.

Rene Descartes, the seventeenth-century French philosopher, was captivated by the question of how we know truth. His answer was simply this: that we know truth by rational thought—rational arguments bring us to credible conclusions. He argued against the belief that our senses can be trusted to find truth. For example, it appears to the senses that the sun moves around the earth, but we know by astrophysical math that the earth moves around the sun.

Descartes begins his *First Meditation* by saying that many of the beliefs he had long cherished were false, and this made him think that the ‘whole edifice’ of his beliefs was ‘highly doubtful.’ What is his response to the threat of skepticism? He writes, “I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start again right from the foundations if I wanted to establish anything at all in the sciences that was stable.” Descartes’ response to the problem looks paradoxical: it is not to turn his back on skepticism, but to embrace it. It is not to stop doubting, but instead to refuse to accept anything that it is possible to doubt. Why? Because Descartes thinks it is the only way to discover whether it is something that cannot be doubted—something absolutely true.

If one has a house with rotten timber and shaky foundations, the solution is to demolish it, and find the foundations, and then rebuild from scratch. Descartes suggests that the best way to get to the truth is to reject all our beliefs together in one go, as if they were all uncertain and false, even if they aren’t. Then go over each belief in turn and re-adopt only those which we recognize to be true and *indubitable* (I love that word). So where did the great philosopher Descartes get such a notion—that our senses cannot be trusted to point us to the truth? I have a good idea that it came from Paul who said to the Corinthians: “*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal*” (2 Corinthians 4:18). And most certainly he was familiar with what Jesus told Thomas after the resurrection: “*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (John 20:29). Rene Descartes would often say: “Doubt is the origin of wisdom.”

So given our doubts, how do we know what is true and *indubitable* from the SACRED HISTORY of our faith? By SACRED HISTORY I mean the things that Jesus told the two people on the Emmaus road about himself—based on Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms. The gospel account of Jesus’ resurrection reveals that ultimately it is the testimony of God’s mighty acts *in history* that affirms in the heart of believers that Jesus is risen. This is exactly how Jesus opened the eyes of his two bewildered friends on the Emmaus road. His key teaching in this part of his encounter with the Emmaus travelers is verse 44: *He said to them, “This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is*

written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.” Did you hear that? Everything must be fulfilled!

I once knew a professor of art history who could not believe in Jesus’ resurrection because it simply did not make rational sense. For her the story was imaginative “wish projection.” Had she been familiar with the historic testimony of the Bible, its SACRED HISTORY, she would have discovered that the resurrection is well within the bounds of reason—with the aid of the Holy Spirit and faith, of course.

The Bible invites all of us to ask ourselves a few pertinent questions: What is my place in the SACRED HISTORY of the resurrection? To what purpose or mission is God calling me? How might I participate in God’s promise and fulfillment throughout SACRED HISTORY? Remember this: *Everything must be fulfilled!*

When we hold New Member Lunch and Seminars for those interested in becoming part of the community of believers at Ken Mawr, I ask the folks present to relate the story of their baptism to the rest of the group—as far as they know it and are familiar with it. Why do I ask people who want to join our church to do this, you ask? Because the story of our baptism (where, when, by whom, with what biological family members present, and so on) is a big part of our SACRED HISTORY. Baptism in our tradition is usually the first step of faith taken by our parents on our behalf. Christian parents desire to present their children for the Sacrament of Baptism, so they may state their own faith publicly and acknowledge the immense grace of God that is given to us even when we are infants—helpless to care for or feed ourselves or capable of professing the Christian faith for ourselves. Our baptism as a helpless infant is an amazing sign and seal of the grace given to us through Jesus Christ. But how do we know that the story of Christ’s life, death and resurrection is true?

Prompted by the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, the Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563 in Trent (northern Italy) jump started the Counter-Reformation. The Catholic Church felt it necessary to respond to Protestant challenges and to a range of internal needs, most of which predated the Reformation. But then after the Council of Trent, Catholic scholars reprinted early medieval works on the history of the Church and the saints in large quantities. These new works of Catholic *historia sacra* (i.e. Sacred History), were written and published on an unprecedented scale. The medieval Church set out to reclaim their SACRED HISTORY. This historic enterprise included magnificent libraries—‘arsenals of faith’ as they were called—as well as the creation of the more famous Vatican archives.

The “doubts” raised by the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century caused the medieval Catholic Church to seek the truth anew immediately following the Reformation. But is that part of our SACRED HISTORY?

This week I came across a CURRENT HISTORY news story with the headline: **Cow runs away from Indiana police, blocks traffic and goes to Chick-Fil-A** (by Hunter Geisel, Sunday, March 17th 2019). You heard that right. NOBLESVILLE, IN (KUTV)—A cow temporarily halted traffic in a town just north of Indianapolis on Saturday, running away from police to the nearest “safe” spot: **a Chick-fil-A restaurant**. According to the Noblesville Police Department, officers were chasing a runaway cow across Campus Parkway before it crossed the street and waited by the fast-food chain. Indiana resident Athena

Hopkins caught the wild cow crossing the street on video, which quickly went viral when she posted it to Facebook.

This silly story is NOT SACRED HISTORY, but it illustrates that when Chick-fil-A advertises a picture of a black and white guernsey cow holding a sign that reads “Eat mor chik’n,” it might actually be true. If you and I were cows, after all, wouldn’t we promote eating at Chick-fil-A too? By reason and logic, argued Descartes, we should work to determine that which is true, including the resurrection of the Lord, and in a weird way, if cows really do prefer the chicken restaurant chain to burger joints.

I have used the following story before, so if you remember it, please bear with me, because I’m using it again. In a small Catholic seminary, the dean asked a first-year student to preach one day in chapel. This novice worked all night on a sermon, but still came up empty. At the appropriate time, he stood in the pulpit, looked out over his brothers and said, “Do you know what I’m going to say?” They all shook their heads “no” and he said, “neither do I, the service has ended, go in peace.”

Well, the dean was angry, and told the student, “You will preach again tomorrow, and you had better have a sermon.” Again, the novice stayed up all night, but still no sermon. When he stood in the pulpit, he asked “Do you know what I am going to say?” All the students nodded “yes” so the preacher said “Then there is no need for me to tell you. The service has ended, go in peace.”

Now, the dean was livid. “Son, you have one more chance. Preach the gospel tomorrow or you will be expelled from the seminary.” Again, he worked all night, and the next morning stood before his classmates and asked “Do you know what I am going to say?” Half of them nodded “yes” while the other half shook their heads “no.” The novice said “Those who know, tell those who don’t know. The service has ended, go in peace.”

This time, the dean just smiled. He walked up to the novice preacher, put his arm around his shoulders and said, “Hmm...those who know, tell those who don’t know? Today, the gospel has been proclaimed. The service has ended, go in peace.”

That’s it! That’s the SACRED HISTORY that two people heard on the road to Emmaus. Those who knew about the resurrected Jesus felt compelled to tell those who did not know. The Christian story is still best told to one person at a time. Preachers will preach, writers will write, millions will be reached by TV, radio, and the internet, but the way this SACRED HISTORY was intended to be shared is when one person who knows the story tells another person who does not know it.

We are reluctant story-tellers, to speak of our faith because religion is considered a private thing. We are unwilling to share our story with others for fear that we might offend them. And the result is that we leave our SACRED HISTORY in the history books, untested and untried. And that, my friends, is very sad. Telling the story is both a privilege and a responsibility for every Christian, and the time has come for us to do what we have been called to do.

All of us meet Jesus in our own unique way, just like the travelers on the road to Emmaus. We don’t have to be seminary graduates—they weren’t! We don’t have to have dozens of Bible verses memorized—clearly, they didn’t. But we must know that Jesus is alive, and he chooses to forgive the sins of those who

call upon him, and he promises to go with us wherever we may go. Truth is: “Those who know, tell those who don’t know...the SACRED HISTORY.” Amen.