



Did not our hearts burn within us?

A couple of years ago I attended the funeral of one of our priests, Fr Michael Cryan in Perth. I knew that as Director I would have to give a short eulogy so I spent a couple of days contemplating what I had learnt from Michael.

In the seminary he taught me English Expression. He taught me to be clear about what I wanted to say and to say it in as few words as possible. It was not an easy lesson to learn because I was a young missionary and had so much to say. At least I learnt that words are important.

Later whenever I visited him in Perth I learnt that it wasn't just words but the Word that was important to him. His room was normally full of books on Scripture and the floor scattered with drafts of the commentary he always intended to publish. He loved the Word of God and spent much of his life studying it.

He reminded me of the Gospel passage where St Luke describes the disciples walking to Emmaus after the crucifixion. They are downcast and Jesus joins them and explains to them how he had to die. Later when he disappears the disciples say to one another, "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?"

I find that comment both inspiring and challenging. It is critical that we Christians learn to preach the Word in a way that makes people's hearts burn. To do this we must not only know the Scriptures but we need to follow Jesus' example on the road to Emmaus. He listened to the disciples. He knew how they were suffering and spoke to their pain. He was also able to share his reasons for hope. During Jesus' lifetime people frequently said of him that he spoke with authority. His authority was that they knew he was speaking the truth about them, about their joys and sufferings, and he gave them reasons to hope.

So, I am grateful to Fr Michael for the good example he gave me. He taught me that it is important to constantly study and pray about the Scriptures if we are to preach in a way that makes people's hearts burn within them.

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