Imagine meeting a stranger at a safe distance, of 6 feet or more, who knew nothing about the coronavirus. It would be pretty hard to believe. But that is our Gospel today in a nutshell. Two of Jesus’ disciples encounter a man who asks, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They were downcast. And one replies, ‘Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus?’ (Luke 24: 13-25)

The disciples are in the presence of the risen Christ, but their eyes were prevented from seeing him. So, Jesus begins to help them to see over the course of a long walk of at least 7 miles. Systematically, Jesus connects the story of Moses and the Prophets and all the Old Testament references to the coming of the Messiah. He helps them to understand how Scripture relates to their own lives and their own situation. When they finally reach their destination, Emmaus, the disciples invite Jesus in for a simple meal (26-29).

Jesus takes bread, blesses it, and shares it with them. “With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight” (31). Once he has left, it all comes together for the disciples. They recognize that Jesus had been present with them all along. They can’t wait to go and share the good news with the apostles. So, they put on their sandals and rush back to Jerusalem to let the 11 apostles know “how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread” (35).

Luke’s Gospel of the two disciples encountering Jesus on the Road to Emmaus is a mini explanation of Mass. The Gospel takes place on Easter Sunday. We gather each Sunday to celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord and Savior. Yes, after Easter Sunday, we take the next 51 Sundays of the year and celebrate a mini Easter each and every Sunday. Mini is perhaps the wrong word, but my point is that we celebrate the passion, death and resurrection of our Lord each and every Sunday.

When we gather for Mass, even remotely, as we are currently doing, our liturgy follows the pattern of the story of the disciples encountering Jesus on the road to Emmaus. A consistent theme throughout the year is that the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus were accomplished in fulfillment of Old Testament promises and of Jewish hopes. Just as Jesus spoke to the two disciples, he speaks to us through the proclamation of the Gospel and the reading from the Old Testament, the responsorial psalm and usually the new testament epistle. During the Easter Season, we often hear from the Acts of the Apostles which tells of the developing years of the church. On the road to Emmaus, Jesus broke open the Scripture and connected it to current events. The homily at Mass is meant to do the same thing. The priest or deacon tries to preach the Good News in such a way that he connects the readings to the daily lives of the faithful.

And where people may have walked 7 miles to come to come to Mass on Sunday, the faithful fill cheated if the priest does not preach for 45 minutes to an hour. Although rare in Alaska, this is not uncommon in places like Nigeria where Fr. Alphonsus and Fr. Aiden come from.

After the Scriptures have been opened up for us with a homily, we transition from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The priest acts in the person of Jesus Christ. He prays as Jesus did at the Lord’s Supper so that the bread and wine that are blessed and broken become the Body and Blood of Christ. Yes, every Sunday, Jesus comes to dine with us. Like the two disciples we may not recognize it.

As we celebrate Mass at a distance to keep the coronavirus from spreading, I have heard interesting testimonies from some of our faithful akin to the two disciples in the Gospel. “Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?” (24:32). Nothing can separate us from the love of God. Even though, we are not able to gather together as normal, Jesus is present to us walking the journey and helping us to grow in our understanding and love of God.