

There is a pattern and an order to most things we experience. That order gives us structure; a sense of security; within that framework we can safely encounter new things. Let me give you a few examples. When you're watching Mr. Rogers Neighborhood, what do you expect to have happen? You expect Mr. Rogers to come through the doorway, singing, “It's a Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood,” you expect him to hang up his sport coat, take off his dress shoes, and change into his cardigan and sneakers. You expect him to speak directly to you about the day's theme, you expect him to feed the fish, visit with his friends, take you on a tour of a factory or an artist's studio, and, of course, visit the Land of Make Believe. Finally, you expect him to change back into his coat and shoes and make his exit singing, ‘It's Such A Good Feeling To Know You're Alive.’ It's the same show every time—but it's not. It's the same structure—but within the framework there is endless variety—try 998 episodes worth of variety.

Or consider the order of baseball game. I don't recall going to a baseball game wondering, “Are they going to play 4 innings or 25 innings tonight?” Normally, you go to a professional baseball game expecting 9 innings to be played. You know things are getting ready to roll with the singing of the national anthem. The players are introduced. You expect the teams to alternate between hitting and fielding. In the middle of the seventh inning, you expect to stand and sing “Take Me Out To The Ballgame,” and if the game isn't tied after the bottom of the ninth, you go home. It's the same game every time—but of course, it's not. It's the same structure—but within the framework there is an endless variety of plays and outcomes, which statisticians have tracked for decades.

Or think of a normal school day. There is a pattern and a routine to the way teachers and students move through the day. There's no guessing when recess or lunchtime is. You know when your favorite subject and your not-so-favorite subject is coming. It's the same school day every time—but it's not. It's the same structure—but within the framework there is an endless variety of lessons to be learned, in and out of the classroom.

And so you come to church on Sunday morning and you expect a Confession and Absolution, a Psalm, a series of readings from the Bible, usually Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel. You expect an explanation of God's Word, you expect the

opportunity to give an offering and to pray to the Lord, and much of the time you expect to participate in something we call the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion. Along the way there are liturgical songs—portions of the Bible set to music—such as “Create In Me A Clean Heart, O God,” “Lamb of God You Take Away The Sin Of The World,” “This Is The Feast Of Victory For Our God,” and many others. Along the way there are hymns—songs that teach the faith and give voice to our praise of God—many of which we have come to treasure. It's the same service every time—but it's not. It's the same structure—but within the framework there is an endless variety of stories and themes that center on the mighty works of God and the living presence of Jesus Christ in His Church.

Order serves us well. (Just think of what can happen when your getting-ready-in-the-morning routine is interrupted.) But it must be said that order and routine can also make us so comfortable that we are lulled to sleep. Nowhere is that more true than in worship. We've all the experience—let's admit it—of being in a worship service, while at the same time you're mentally making your grocery list, or wondering if kickoff is at 1:00 or 4:00. I would suggest the antidote to unconscious worship is simply to keep on asking “why”—to continually review together the purpose of our time spent in worship. Why do we interact with Jesus in the way that we do? The answer to that question is found in today's Gospel reading.

The Emmaus experience described in Luke 24 is far more than just a neat add-on to the Easter story. It actually forms the foundation for how we experience Jesus in our lives! Here's what I mean: look for the pattern that emerges. The risen Jesus walks with two men, and during that walk, He explained the Old Testament to them. He went through Moses and the prophets, describing how these writings were pointing to Him! Later on, these men would say, “Didn't our hearts burn as he explained the Bible to us!”

Then, later that evening, Jesus sits down at the table with them and—listen carefully to this language—“he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them.” Then their eyes were opened, and they knew who he was.” They recognized it was Jesus at the table with them.

Did the pattern pop out at you? The first part of this experience was instruction in the Word of God. It made their hearts glow with wonder. But this experience was only complete when they moved to the table, and Jesus gave thanks over bread, broke it, and gave it to them. Now, Jesus was not only someone they learned about, but someone who was with them. Then he disappeared, he vanished from their sight, as if to say, “Now that I'm risen and will soon be returning to my Father, this is how I will

come to you until I return at the Last Day. My Words will be with you; and my body and blood will be with you in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the wine that happen at the table. You will know me in these ways that I am leaving behind for you."

Do you see the pattern? In the first part of our worship, the Bible explains who Jesus is; in the second part, Jesus Himself comes to our table. With the Emmaus experience, Jesus laid out how He was going to give himself to us. He is still doing it. And that's what we're really doing here.

A pastor once asked a group of very young children, "Why do you go to church?" One little girl responded, "We go to church to be with Jesus." Now before you say, "Oh, what a cute story," and then forget it, just understand this: That little girl was absolutely right. I urge you to look for Jesus where He said he would be! At Emmaus he demonstrated He would be in His Word, and in the breaking of the bread. He continues to come to us through this pattern to save us from the depths of hell. He comes to us through Word, Bread and Wine to forgive our sins yet again! Within this framework, the risen and living Son of God touches you, forgives your sin, breathes faith and life into you, renovates your heart, resets your values and welcomes you to your place in His kingdom! The risen Savior comes, just to spend time with you.

You really can go to church to be with Jesus. That's the promise of Emmaus, Let your eyes be opened to recognize Him.