



# Thought For The Week

## *Embody Sacred Community*

*May 11, 2014*

Scriptures: Acts 2: 14: 22,23 • 1 Peter 1: 17-21 • Luke 24: 13-35

If you should ever visit the Art Institute of Chicago, do not miss the opportunity to stop and view a famous painting by the American artist, Edward Hopper. He titled it *Nighthawks*. I must admit that I have never seen the painting first hand, but I have seen reproductions of it appear in many places. It is truly engaging.

The scene is a late-night diner. From your view on the sidewalk, you are looking in on three individuals seated at half-circular counter seemingly lost in their own thoughts. Two are a couple, while a third man is sitting alone with his back to the viewer. The diner's sole attendant, looking up from his work, appears to be peering out the window past the customers.

One has the impression that the hour is late; there are no passers by on the sidewalk or street (except yourself, of course.) There is a sense of gloominess about the entire scene, three people with seemingly scant concern for one another, waiting at the counter for service, perhaps, or simply waiting for the moment when they must at last step out onto the sidewalk, into the night air and go their separate ways.

An interesting element in the painting is that the three are obviously seated in a diner, but they are not eating, at least not at the moment. Why are they not eating? Who knows; perhaps they are simply ending the day. The painter gives us no clue why they are there. We are left to our own devices for an answer.

Perhaps Mr. Hopper wants to convey the sense that these three individuals are a metaphor for the thousands of lonely people who habitually seek out the warmth of a late-night diner to gather their thoughts at day's-end before walking into the darkness of the night.

The reason I wanted to share this narrative of the three "nighthawks" is because another artist, a writer named Luke the Evangelist, with pen in hand, paints a story of three individuals whose experience of sitting at table at a diner, an inn, is exactly opposite that described in Hopper's pictorial tale.

This is the story we have come to know in the scriptures as the accidental meeting on the road to Emmaus. Two companions are on their way home after the tragic crucifixion of their friend Jesus of Nazareth. As they walk along, a stranger draws up and walks with them and asks what they are so earnestly talking about. Sadly, they relate the details of the previous days events. To their great surprise the stranger explains how all the scriptures "had to be fulfilled in himself."

At a road juncture near Emmaus, Jesus, still a stranger to them, intends to go on alone. The two companions, however, want to hear more. "It is near evening," they say, "let's have supper together."

It is at this table setting where Jesus breaks bread with them that they clearly come to know him as their friend and Lord.

The implication and connection I see in these two stories is that many people in the world often seem like lonely "Nighthawks" at a diner, an eating place, seated alone with their private thoughts. Unfortunately, they seem to find no human nourishment there; they are simply private individuals lost in their loneliness.

The Emmaus story turns this scene around. There we find three individuals who discover the deepest kind of nourishment, not only in the bread and the breaking of it but also in the discovery of a friendship that thought they had lost forever.

Given the context of all this, it might be true to say, sadly enough, that many of us sit at lonely diners searching for food that will nourish the body, mind and spirit. In a way it may seem that our experience of the Communion on Sunday is like a Nighthawk diner. We sit alone with our private thoughts, oblivious of the other person sitting next to us. The Emmaus story tells us that it could be different. The way out of our loneliness is to notice, to talk and to break bread with someone. Yes, it's really all that simple.

## Prayer Thought For The Week

We give thanks to you, Lord God, and praise your works of peace. Help us be open to your presence in all creation as we seek to live in righteous relationship with one another, with our world, and you.

We confess to you our shortcomings. In your compassion forgive our sins and lead us in your ways of peace.

We pray for this community, the nations of our world, and uphold the people of Sudan in our prayers. Grant wisdom and strength to all who work for, just and peaceable communities for all persons.

We pray for all people in their daily life and work. May all who are in need find dignified and meaningful work so they may provide for themselves and their families. May all recognize their responsibility in sharing Earth's abundant resources.

In the name of the Prince of Peace we pray. Amen.

## Stewardship Thought For The Week

We are to give an individually determined amount. "Each one...as he purposes in his heart." It is important to realize that sowing bountifully is a relative term. Jesus taught that a poor widow that gave less money out of her poverty offered more than the rich that gave out of their surplus.

*(Luke 21: 1-4)*

God does not need what we have, He is more concerned with the attitude of our heart when we give. It is an individual's expression of worship. It is a sacrifice that pleases God. The desire of the heart expresses love for God and for His people.

Generosity proclaims that people created in the image of God are more important than the things we possess. It also delivers us from trusting in those temporal things for our security. When we give generously we acknowledge that all things come from God and all things belong to God.