



Third Sunday of Easter April 30, 2017 A

Reflections on Luke's famous 'Road to Emmaus' story (Lk 24:13-35)

Here are some reflections on Luke's well known and loved story of Jesus dialoguing with two strangers on the road to Emmaus.

Reflection #1: Story of a journey from unbelief to belief, from despair to hope

The first part of the story is like our Liturgy of the Word. Jesus proclaims the word to the two despairing disciples and opens their eyes to the *meaning* of the Scriptures.

Then we have a Liturgy of the Eucharist. Just as he did at the Last Supper, Jesus *takes* bread, *blesses* it, *breaks* it and *gives* it to the disciples. In the *breaking of the bread*, the eyes of the disciples are opened and they come to believe in Jesus' presence. Some commentators note that Luke uses this story to communicate to those who are missing the *physical* presence of Christ, that their celebration of the Eucharist is the new way that Jesus is going to be with them. Just as he fed them prior to the Resurrection with his teaching, now he will continue to feed and nourish them in and through the proclamation of the Scriptures and the breaking of the bread. When they (and we) gather together to listen to his Word and break bread, Jesus is truly in our midst.

Reflection # 2: Moving from unbelief to belief

All of us have taken a trip at one time or another in our lives.

We take trips for business purposes, for pleasure, or for other reasons. A trip might even consist of merely going across town to shop or to visit people we love and care about.

Today's Gospel is a story about two disciples who are on a journey. Cleopas and another unnamed person are taking a short trip from Jerusalem to Emmaus—about seven miles. Of course they are walking.

They are hoping that Jesus of Nazareth, the prophet who had been powerful in word and deed, the one who had been condemned to death and crucified, is the one who will free the Jews from Roman domination.

There has been a story, too, that Jesus is alive. But these two do not believe such a rumor. In the early evening, they pick up a hitchhiker and together they discuss the Old Testament.

When it comes time for dinner, they invite the stranger walking with them to join them. The man accepts. When he breaks bread with them, their eyes are opened to the fact that their guest is Jesus.

These two disciples travel from doubt to despair to faith in the Resurrection of Jesus.

We, too, are on a trip. We spend our lives traveling not only on business, for pleasure, or to visit family and friends, but also from doubt and despair to faith in the Resurrection of Jesus. We do not go on the same physical road taken by the two disciples but we travel the same road of faith. As we do, we find that we are sojourning in what appears to be a strange land.

We doubt and despair in times of sickness or when we find out that someone we know and love has cancer or AIDS, or some other terminal disease. That's when we travel the road of doubt asking why this would happen to such a person. If there is a God, why does he permit such things to happen?

Then somehow, sooner or later, God breaks through into our lives. We come to accept our human limitations, learn how to share in suffering, toss aside our anger with God, and see how God is at work in our lives through this sickness.

We travel the road of doubt and despair to belief—like those disciples of old.

We also travel this same road when we experience a death in the family. The death of a loved one brings on doubt and despair. Why do we have to die? Why does God take people? What will happen to me now that my spouse is gone? These questions clearly bespeak doubt and despair. If death occurred as a result of an accident or suicide, the feeling of doubt and despair is even greater.

As death is dealt with and accepted, and as people work through their grief, they gradually come to life again. They travel the road from doubt and despair to belief as did those two disciples walking to Emmaus.

We spend our whole lives making this trip over and over again. Each one of us knows this road very well. We are constantly taking this trip from doubt and despair to faith. Along the way, we experience the Resurrection of Jesus. We discover Jesus alive and with

us. Sometimes we are so caught up in our doubt and despair that we cannot see Jesus as he travels with us.

The two disciples are also blinded by their doubt and despair. They cannot see that the hitchhiker who make their hearts burn is Jesus with them.

The very moments of doubt and despair are themselves a sign of God at work in our lives. God works through us, just as he once did with Jesus.

Doubt and despair, while not pleasant experiences, can be the signs and wonders that reveal to us the God who raised Jesus from the dead. These are our credentials showing that God is with us as we travel through life.

God often chooses strange signs to move us from doubt and despair to faith. He chose his own Son's Crucifixion and death's bitter pangs to reveal the fullness of a life of faith.

Likewise, God chooses the everyday doubts and despair in our lives as we make our sojourn—our life's trip—to enable us to experience faith.

If we feel our hearts burning within us in our moments of doubt and despair, then sooner or later our eyes will be opened and we will recognize Jesus with us, whereupon he will vanish from our sight, waiting for another opportunity to travel with us and bring us to faith once again in his Resurrection. He is with us throughout our lifetime trials.

Reflection #3: Everybody has a faith story

The following piece is by Fr. Flor McCarthy.

Today's Gospel is all about story-telling. Those two disciples had a story to tell, one full of disappointment and disillusionment. It was really bothering them. Jesus showed such delicacy by joining them as a stranger. People often find it easier to unburden on a stranger. Straightaway he showed an interest in their lives by asking them what they were talking about. Thus, he created a climate in which they felt like talking. And they did talk. They poured out their sad story to him.

Then what did he do? He began to tell his own story. For them the cross had been an insurmountable obstacle. It had signaled the end of their interest in Christ. But now Christ showed them how the Scriptures had foretold the cross. He showed them that the cross, far from being the end of the dream, was paradoxically the means by which it became a reality. He helped them to find a meaning in their story by showing them the meaning he had found in his own. Thus, he enabled them to turn their lives around.

As said earlier, everybody has a story to tell. Everybody wants to be taken seriously. Alas, many

never get a chance to tell their stories. They never encounter someone to whom they can unwind, someone who will listen to their story and say: "It's okay." To accept one's story means there is no longer any room for self-hatred. It is especially by accepting the dark side of our story that we learn what God's grace and love are all about. However, in the final analysis, it is only the Christ Story (glory achieved through a sharing in his suffering and death) that helps us to make ultimate sense of our own story. Anything else is simply not adequate.

Every human story is the story of a journey, the journey of life. Christ is with us on this journey, even when we don't recognize him; but we must not see our journey in isolation anymore. We are members of the people of God. This means we make the journey to the Father's Kingdom together.

"Wherever people have lived, there is a story to be told."

Reflection Questions

1. Can you relate your faith story? When did God open your eyes to his presence?
2. What about the Scriptures? Can you use them for spiritual reading, or do they continue to be too difficult or dry for you?

We can be sure God wants to break open his Word for each of us. Many have found that the Small Christian Communities are one place where that happens for them.

*I sought to see the Face of God,
I climbed the highest steeple,
But God declared, "Go down again,
I dwell among my people."*

- John Henry Cardinal Newman

Do This in Memory of Me

*Was ever another command so obeyed?
For century after century,
spreading slowly to every continent and country
and among every race on earth,
this action has been done in every conceivable human
circumstance for every conceivable human need
from infancy and before it,
to extreme old age and after it,
from the pinnacles of earthly greatness
to the refuge of fugitives
in the caves and dens of the earth.*

*Men have found no better thing than this to do
for kings at their crowning
and for criminals going to the scaffold,
for armies in triumph
or for a bride and bridegroom in a country church. . .
for the famine of a whole province
or for the soul of a dear lover. . .
And best of all, week by week, and month by month,
on a hundred thousand Sundays, faithfully, unfailingly,
across all the parishes of Christendom,
priest and people continue to work together
in order to carry out this command,
"Do this in memory of me."*

- Don Gregory Dix

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Aaron