

*Meditation of the day*  
COMMENTARY ON LK 24, 15-35

**TUESDAY, 7/16**

*Lk 15-18 : And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?"*

**Introduction**

Good morning dearest Pilgrims! Good morning everyone!

Think how fortunate we are to be here!, What a great privilege it is to be able to pause for a few days with no other thought than to immerse ourselves in the Gospel... to go deep into God's word!

Outside there is a hectic world rushing by... some because of work, some because of vacations, and some because of constant tasks... in a constant chase toward a time that flees, and toward a happiness that cannot be reached!

For a few days we will STOP time here. We will live in dilated time... we will not have to run... we will not have anxiety! We will not walk forward, but descend inward, deeply. We will sit still in a chair, but take an exciting journey, full of discovery... an exploration within the Gospel, and an exploration within ourselves! We will come out transformed, because contact with the Word of the Lord renews life.

Each day we will be offered bits and pieces of the Gospel, a few verses, small crumbs, that we will quietly savor, to rediscover how much richness of flavor and fragrance there is in a morsel of the Gospel savored together.

I have no official expertise to lead you on this path. I am not a priest or a nun or even a Biblical scholar. And I do not know why I was chosen by the very good and kind organizers of this magnificent congress. Perhaps because I am a lover of the Gospel?

I can only assure you of this: that every word I will tell you is embodied in my life...it is the Gospel word tested in my life in its most painful moments as well as in its most joyful ones.

The word of the Gospel is a word that has never failed me, and has transformed me, AND continues to transform me. It is a force of life that always renews us!

The task entrusted to me is a challenging one, asking not only to comment on the verses in Luke, concerning the disciples going to Emmaus after Jesus' passion and death, but also to connect them with the Eucharistic liturgy.



Therefore, I will try each day to accompany you along three paths, which will be freely interwoven, without any fixed and rigid patterns, because I do not like to be didactic. The Gospel is life and life needs to move with freedom.

The paths along which we will walk are these:

1. Relive the experience of the two disciples of Emmaus through a narrative that leads us to empathize with them.
2. Carefully observe Jesus' behavior... what words and gestures he chooses... what they have to say to us now.
3. Connect the gospel passages to the Eucharistic liturgy... to the parts of which it is composed.

The goal is to have a transformative inner experience. To have the Hands of the Lord work on us. To be moved by the Breath of His Spirit to open ourselves... to be renewed.

To feel that His Word is to us what spring is to the meadows... to the meadows greening, budding, blooming.

To do it all together, here, with so many people, is something absolutely exceptional... it excites me so much! Just think: we are thousands of hearts here disposed together to be moved by God's Word!!

Here, I wish for all of us, with all my affection, that our hearts can burn, that Jesus can rekindle us... rekindle the flame of our faith! Think of how much heat we will all give off, together!

### **Commentary**

Considering the two from Emmaus... exegetes explain that they may have been two friends or perhaps a couple. I walk with them and listen to their pain.

We do not think often enough about a fact that is the basic reality of the Christian faith... the faith arises from a trauma, the most terrible ever experienced by believers of all faiths, the Cross... the inconceivable trauma... God allowing himself to be killed!! Along with Jesus, dies on the cross the DREAM of a redeemed, healed humanity, a DREAM of universal brotherhood and love, the DREAM of DREAMS... a great cause, annihilated in a few hours of interrogation, torture and merciless execution!

There was a small community of disciples... disciples who had taken shape around that DREAM, a vibrant community, though not without, within it, misunderstandings and conflicts.

Those women and men had had to witness the rape of their hope. They had witnessed the violence unleashed against an Innocent with eyes as transparent and good as a child's.

A strong and arrogant power had spat over the Face of Jesus, over the face of a man who showed the true face of humanity.

And then the Blood from His sweet Hands... the Feet nailed to the wood... those Hands that had been able with so much love to care and caress... those tireless Feet always on their way to bring a word of life, an embrace of love even to the most distant and marginalized.



Jesus' friends have all this in their eyes and in their hearts: horror and unspeakable pain printed in their memories in indelibly blood-red characters. And, they feel the emptiness, fearfully as an abyss, of missing Jesus.

Stunned, disoriented, frightened, the disciples dispersed or shut themselves in.

Space has shrunk around them to the extent of their fears and disappointment. The expansive spaces to which the Rabbi of Galilee rode the lands and skies on the back of a donkey that they were accustomed to, are but a memory...their geography of the heart has suddenly become cramped and consequently their intelligence of reality has also shrunk.

From a goal that seemed close, within reach -- the Kingdom of God promised by Him -- they find themselves thrown back into the incomprehensible and dark depths of those who, having set sail for open seas with the enthusiasm of the most beautiful adventure, have felt the boat crumble under their feet.

The two from Emmaus are two castaways, two wrecks drifting, no longer having a course to head for. And, they feel that their lives no longer make sense.

They had cultivated a DREAM during those three years with Jesus, which had made their desires fly high. That Rabbi with calloused hands, at once simple and mysterious, had kindled that wonderful DREAM in them... instead of this sad history of ours, which seems to repeat itself over and over again -- a history of violence and abuse, of slaves and masters -- Jesus had opened wide to them horizons of new heavens and new lands. He had promised a kingdom of love, a place where everyone's face is as clear as a child's, and the hand hides no sting...a restored humanity, a garden where life flourishes and matures, and gives itself away, without enemies....

Those who had followed Jesus had believed Him, because they had seen Him at work. They had seen the sick healed, the poor suffering creatures, oppressed in body and spirit, resume the path of life, made new again. They had seen prostitutes, hardened in cynicism, return to weeping and love for real. They had seen hardened sinners, money grabbers, leave everything and give themselves to a dangerous mission, that of the Rabbi of Galilee persecuted by the Pharisees. They had heard criminals on the scaffold utter words of tenderness -- and the dead come back to life!

They had thought him Divine, that man, so capable of love and life-giving: Son of Man and Son of God.

But then this man-God, powerful prophet, who healed the dying and raised the dead - had been killed! Human hands had struck him...So simply, as one strikes any other poor human life, in this same way Jesus had been tortured, plagued, whipped, and killed.! Power had judged him a reject, a man to be eliminated!!

The disciples had run away! They had been afraid... everything was too much bigger than they, and too unpredictably bewildering.

The world collapsed on them. The ground was missing under their feet... a fall into the unknown!

One does not pass unscathed from a trauma of this magnitude. I imagine them in shock, the two from Emmaus, walking close together to give each other some courage and fill the silence with words, with constantly repeated stories and unanswered questions, for fear of silence, for fear of being alone in front of that emptiness, that abyss.

They came from Jerusalem... Away! escape from that cursed place! Away, abandon there the rubble of the dream, the castles in the air!...To leave, to go back, to shrink back to the measure of



everyday life, to let the usual little everyday desires take over: more bread, less toil, a little more well-being... And maybe, who knows, to hope for a political reversal, but nothing else.

How terrible is the pain of the loss of dreams! How terrible it is to see that hopes are not realized, that love dies!

How cruel is the blow to our hearts when for the umpteenth time we see that it was unlove, bullying, injustice that won!

You feel lost, alone, and you'd like to lash out at someone, lash out at an enemy, but you realize that the disappointment, the defeat is also yours... you yourself let yourself down... you yourself feel like a loser. You find yourself not loving yourself, despising yourself, wondering if your life has any meaning.

Jesus comes into our lives on days like this, as we walk on regressive roads going back to an Emmaus that is for us the place of no hope, the place of disillusionment, of so-called "realism." The place where we go knowing that nothing new will happen there, and that we will have to accept the world as it is and come to terms with it, and dream no more.

We no longer want to look up, to dream big, because everything has collapsed and come crashing down on us. Life will go back to the usual grind, and we will shift our desires to small things, looking down, lest we feel hopeless.

I feel Jesus' disciples, those two, are similar to me. Similar, because they tread the same footsteps of my defeats, my disillusionments, my despair. Similar, because they go down the same dark valleys, go into the same nights where it seems there is not even a thread of friendly light to give you courage... Only darkness and sadness, darkness and fear... Nothing else.

And you can't wait to get home, to close the door behind you and defend yourself from life, from its fearful attacks.

But something happens... an unexpected and seemingly chance encounter. Along their road of disappointment the two from Emmaus encounter a stranger, one they have never seen.

Jesus' first words are a question: *What are these conversations you are having among yourselves along the way?*

Hear what finesse and also what irony is in this question of Jesus, pretending to know nothing about anything, as if he were a stranger dropped in from who knows where. And the answer of the two, in fact, is: *Only you are a stranger in Jerusalem! Do you not know what has happened there these days?*, which is equivalent to saying: but are you out of this world?

This is curious. It seems that Jesus adopts a kind of Socratic irony, that is, that method used by the philosopher Socrates of feigning ignorance in order to urge his disciple to explain his own opinion, so that he could see, on his own, that it was unfounded.

Jesus does not ask random questions. It is His method, His pedagogy to solicit responses from the disciples with questions. There are as many as 220 questions from Jesus in the Gospels.

"A Jewish saying goes that in the beginning God created the question mark and laid it in the heart of man" (E. Ronchi).



At the beginning of Jesus' public mission, when the first disciples had begun to follow Him, His first big question had been, *What are you looking for?* (Jn. 1:38), and it is a question Jesus asks us now as well... What do we seek? What moves us? What is my desire? My goal?...Because this is the mainspring of everything...It is what drives my life forward.

Now, on the road to Emmaus, the question is different. Jesus asks, What is this talk you are having? He wants to hear their interpretation of the facts, to hear what they understood about His life and death on the cross. To make them question and open themselves to a new, broader understanding of events.

"The form of the question mark is reminiscent of that of a fish hook, which the Gospel drops into us to hook us, pull us to itself, "fish us out," pull us up to air and conversion.

The great writer Rainer Maria Rilke in his Letters to a Young Poet exhorts his interlocutor to "live the questions well," not to rush immediately from door to door, from book to book, from teacher to teacher in search of answers. To love the questions, to let them work within oneself, like a gestation" (E. Ronchi).

"When someone has answers for all questions, he shows that he is on an ungood path... God infinitely surpasses us, he is always a surprise... Those who want everything clear and certain claim to dominate God's transcendence" (GE 41).

Jesus comes to the disciples bringing a question mark as the first thing.

Let us remember this when we seem to have the truth in our pockets, for Jesus urges us to always ask questions, and to question our reductive readings. Jesus, man and God, is a great mystery that always surprises us.

"Jesus Himself is a question. His life and death question us about the ultimate meaning of things, question us about what makes life happy. And the answer is still him" (E. Ronchi)

How will the two of Emmaus emerge from that despair?

It will be the unthought that saves them... a breach of wonder and newness within their shrunken existences, returned to a mere measure of factual reality.

The eruption of the new happens in the heart of trauma, of all our traumas. It disrupts and relaunches.

"For pessimism, the observation of facts is enough; for optimism, creativity is needed" (F. Mernissi).

And who can ever be more creative than God?

The resurrection is always there to tell us that there can be no loss, no anguish, no disappointment so overwhelming and burning that it cannot be overcome by the creativity of love.

"It is the unexpected news: there is a blessing hidden in our suffering. Somehow a gift is hidden in the midst of our tears" (H. Nouwen).

Our grief sometimes seeks a den, for licking our wounds. Let us give time to do so, to mourn, but let us remain listening, remain open... the Lord is calling us.

Come, He says, come and I will make you discover the light in the darkness of loss, the infinite within the grave of your hopes! There is a gift in tears.

In the Eucharist, this immense gift of Jesus, we retrace the road to Emmaus and meet Him.



For this is what the Eucharist speaks to us about: our lives...And not only does it speak to us, but it takes care of the hurting and wounded life. It renews life, celebrates it, blesses it.

"We come to the Eucharist with hearts broken by many losses, our own and also those of the world." (H. Nouwen). On this bumpy path we meet him again.

In the Eucharist we recite: *Lord, mercy*, a general, communal confession.

To interpret the meaning of this preliminary penitential act, I like to refer to the great poet Dante.

His *Divine Comedy* is a work known to the whole world!...one of the world's greatest masterpieces. And how does it begin? With a man walking in a dark forest, who does not know where to go, feels lost and is so afraid... "In the middle of the journey of our life / I found myself in a dark forest / for the straight path was lost...."

Dante takes a few steps to get out of that dreadful situation, and lo and behold, three ferocious beasts ready to devour him stand before him! They are the image of the evil that is inside and outside him... in his person and in society. Dante freezes, unable to go on any longer.

And what are the first words that Dante, paralyzed by fear, utters? *Miserere di me*: have mercy on me.

These words are a plea for help, not a feeling of guilt, mortified before a judge, but it is asking a friend for a hand, telling him: get me out of here, look where I've gotten myself. It is disposing yourself to let yourself be helped and to let yourself be loved.

*Lord mercy* means then: help me, I can't do it alone. Give me Your hand and bring me out of my dark thickets, out of my crises. Renew me, and with me renew all these others who are now here in this church. Help us all together. It is "hearing God as a living person communicating with our living person" (Vannucci).

"Christ lives. He is our hope and the most beautiful Youth of this world. Everything He touches becomes young, becomes new, becomes filled with life.

He is in you, He is with you and He never leaves. No matter how far you may stray, beside you is the Risen One, calling you and waiting for you to begin again.

When you feel old because of sadness, resentments, fears, doubts or failures, He will be there to restore your strength and hope" (Francis, CV, 1-2).

