

Meditation of the day
COMMENTARY ON LK 24:15-35

Saturday, 7/20

Lk 33-35 : *So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem, where they found gathered together the Eleven and those with them, who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.*

Commentary

We have arrived at the last sequence of Luke's gospel passage: the disciples leave immediately to return to Jerusalem, report to the Eleven what has happened, and discover that Jesus has appeared to them in the city as well.

We can see that even in this last stage the narrative presents a fork in the road and could have alternative endings, and this depends, again, on what the two disciples decide:

1. the disciples might decide to wait, not considering the trip to Jerusalem urgent;
2. the disciples might decide not to go to Jerusalem, thus keeping the news of the resurrection to themselves.

As we have already seen in the previous sequences, here again the disciples make the most creative choice: going to Jerusalem enables them to experience the news of the resurrection not only as a personal joy but as a life force that revives the community, the community that was in danger of dying out and of which they can now instead become a living part again as heralds of the risen Jesus.

Let us note one relevant aspect: the disciples are not sent to the city by an order from Jesus, but act of their own volition, feeling the urgency in their hearts. Jesus does not say do this and that, no; what he explained of the Scriptures and the Eucharistic experience together transformed the disciples and set them in motion, without the need for orders, commands.

They are free and do what they do because they want to, because they feel something urging within them, not because it is commanded to them from outside.

This is one of those passages in the Gospel where there is a great emphasis on freedom, and it is a beautiful thing. I find it exciting.

We too can set ourselves in motion out of longing because we feel something urging within us. The Eucharist ends with the words, *Mass is ended, go in peace* or, on Easter Sundays, *Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord*. We can interpret these as: go on mission (Nouwen). And it is not that you have to have a specific mission to fulfill, you just have to go back to your daily life feeling on mission.

"One forgets that it is not that life *has* a mission, but that *it is* mission" (Xavier Zubiri, in GE 28).



I like to use the image of a construction site: Christian commitment as work on a construction site. The kingdom of God is a construction site at work under our roof. We are its workers.

Choosing the mission means choosing one's identity.

On the one hand, there is the possibility of rejecting responsibility, on the other of assuming it, and on a third hand there is indecision, procrastination.

What identity do the two disciples of Emmaus choose to want?

They go back to Jerusalem where Jesus a few days before had been executed as a criminal. What did it mean to go to that city from which they had departed?

It meant embarking again on the very dangerous and magnificent adventure for which Jesus had called them.

Without a second thought, they left and went to take the proclamation to Jerusalem, rejoined the community, feeling that they had such an important contribution to make that it was worth even risking getting arrested like Jesus.

The two alternatives between going or not going to Jerusalem make us think about what sin really is.

A religious reading that sees God as a monarch who from on high wants our obedience interprets sin as "refusing allegiance to the Sovereign." But the freedom left by Jesus to those who follow him makes us realize that sin is something else: it is "refusing to take responsibility for nurturing, for loving... It is the desire to separate ourselves from others as if we did not need them or they did not need us" (McFague).

The overall movement of the entire passage from Luke that we have read over the past five days goes from resentment and a sense of loss, anger, fear and depression to gratitude through amazement; this leads to a desire to reconnect with community and engagement.

This transformation, thanks to the encounter with Jesus, took place in the disciples at the center of a loss, at a very hard time in their lives, when they lacked the ground under their feet, when they were giving themselves completely wrong answers, had taken a wrong direction and were blind.

This reassures us that that strength of faith, capable of rekindling our will and ability to be useful to the world, is not a condition of idyllic moments; there is no waiting to feel "right" with God, secure, without doubt, when all is well.

"In fact, it is precisely that way of looking at things that keeps us unhappy... Right now, at the very instant when we lack the ground under our feet, the seed of caring for those who need our help and the discovery of our goodness takes root" (Chödrön).

The disciples' desire to return to Jerusalem, to return to the heart of the violent conflict between the political-religious power and Jesus, highlights the social value of faith, the desire "to change the world" that Jesus kindles in us. And Pope Francis wrote a beautiful page on this in *Evangelii gaudium*, which I am pleased to propose to you:

"Reading the Scriptures, it becomes clear that the proposal of the gospel is not only about a personal relationship with God.

Nor should our response of love be understood as a mere sum of small personal gestures toward some needy individual, which could constitute a kind of "charity *à la carte*," a series of actions tending only to appease one's conscience.

The proposal is *the Kingdom of God* (Luke 4:43); it is about loving God who reigns in the world.



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To the extent that He succeeds in reigning among us, social life will be a place of fraternity, justice, peace, and dignity for all.

So, both proclamation and Christian experience tend to prompt social consequences [...].

True Christian hope, which seeks the eschatological Kingdom, always drives history [...].

Consequently, no one can demand of us that we relegate religion to the secret intimacy of people, without any influence on social and national life, without concern for the health of the institutions of civil society [...].

An authentic faith-which is never comfortable and individualistic - always implies a deep desire to change the world, to pass on values, to leave something better behind after our passage on earth."

I wish you, with all my heart, to be able to make your contribution in this change of the world, and to do so with joy, even if in the inevitable labors.

I wish you to be able to act in your own mission territory, giving the best of yourself, because each of you is unique, special, and no one can put you in your place, no one can bring what you can bring, with your talents that belong only to you.

There are many paths that can be taken. Pope Francis points to a few priorities: peace building, the fight to eliminate poverty, and the preservation of the environment on which we depend.

Where to start?

I believe that the story of the disciples of Emmaus can provide us with very useful insights for our challenges today. Luke tells us that the two have an experience of reversing their judgments and opening their eyes.

In today's words, we can say that instead of mulling over news reports and being manipulated by distorted narratives of reality, we can seek the truth. We can listen to the good news of Jesus who calls no one an enemy and sides with the poor, the oppressed, the rejected.

We can work on ourselves and help others to "create a new mentality that thinks in terms of community, of prioritizing the lives of all over the appropriation of goods by a few" (EG).

At the end of the day, that's what it's all about: aiming the focus of our lives on the things that matter and not getting distracted by the insignificant ones. We waste energy and time behind such things as: hustling for more money, trying to look good, shopping, looking at the smartphone every minute, living a self-centered life... it is a bleeding of precious time, distracting us from the important things and stealing the time from our life, which is gone forever. Thus we risk arriving at the end of life full of regrets for what we failed to do.

"It is not that we are given a short life, it is that we throw away a large part of it. It is we who make it short by wasting time. Life is long enough and we are given a sufficiently generous sum to achieve the highest results if it were all well invested... Life is long if you use it well" (L. A. Seneca, *On the Shortness of Life*).

If we are clear about our goal, at every crossroads in life we can choose our adventure well, go toward Jerusalem instead of stopping in Emmaus, and thus not waste our time.

Starting from a young age, from decisive choices such as what studies and work I want to undertake, and then throughout life, at every small or big choice, every person should ask himself at every crossroads: if I go down this road, will I make the world a little better? Will I bring a little more love, a little more care, a little more tenderness? Will there be more health, more education, more justice, more culture? Will I add some beauty and joy? Will the natural environment in which I live be in a better condition?

If the answer is yes, I can trust that that is the right way.

The two from Emmaus, whether they were a couple or two friends, felt an urgency to point the focus of their lives toward the things that matter. And they chose to live their faith not only in an intimate dimension: they left home and set out.

One theologian recalled that "religions die when their light fails; that is, when their teachings no longer illuminate the real lives of their followers.... Where people experience that God still has something to say, the lights stay on" (Johnson).

The disciples felt their lives rekindled in their encounter with Jesus; they understood that they were part of a great story in which God gives men and women the strength to create a world other than this one, a world as God's will dictates.

Luke tells us from the very beginning of his gospel what this new world is. From the last chapter we are now in we jump back to the first chapter and find Mary's words in the *Magnificat*, a song that has not only spiritual but also social significance: to overthrow the mighty from their thrones and lift up the lowly, to fill the hungry with goods and to send the rich back empty-handed... (Luke 1:52-53).

It is a song that unleashes all the liberating power toward the "least" in the gospel message, the "great things" that God works (Luke 1:49).

Today we have a tremendous need to resurrect the great ideals, starting with peace, which means abolition of war once and for all, and its roots which are found in a sick economic system that *needs* wars.

In these days we have heard words of the gospel that make us witnesses of hope.

In a climate of widespread pessimism and resignation, they come to tell us that "death is not the last word, the new energy of the resurrection reaches beyond today; the branch that seemed barren and shrunken, becomes tender.

Therefore let the excited quiver of resurrection enter and dwell in you.

And win and free and release in you the energies of a new resistance to evil; free, release in you all the authenticity of your life" (Casati).

As we conclude our journey together, I wish each and every one of us to be more and more instruments in God's hand for these "great things." And I would like to end with a beautiful prayer by Father John Vannucci, servant of Mary and contemporary mystic. A prayer with which we ask for the strength to overcome our crises, to move forward even when we lack the ground under our feet, keeping alive the certainty that Jesus is waiting around the corner to join us on the journey.

A prayer that makes us feel united, makes us experience the power of goodness circulating among us, the Spirit of God who loves us.

A prayer to encourage us to live our lives as a mission, as courageous people who are not afraid to go against the tide, who are not resigned to the world as it is, who dare to revive the greatest ideals.

Because if Jesus is risen, it means that love, peace, freedom, justice cannot die; they will always rise with him.

"I ask for a glimpse of the stars, that healthy spirit of utopia that leads to gathering energies for a better world (Francis, *The Wisdom of Time*).



I embrace each and every one of you with much love.

Marina Marcolini

Pass on your Spirit, by John Vannucci

*Pass on your Spirit, O Lord, like the spring breeze
That makes life bloom and opens up love*

*You pass your Spirit like the hurricane
Unleashing an unknown force
And raises sleeping energies*

*Pass your Spirit into our gaze
To take it to farther and wider horizons*

Pass into our heart to make it burn with an ardor eager to radiate

*Pass your Spirit over our saddened faces
To make us smile again.*

*Stroke our weary hands
To revive them and joyfully put them back to work.*

*Pass your Spirit upon us [...].
And remain in all our lives to expand them
And give them your divine dimensions.*

Amen.

