

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

Thursday, 7/18

Lk 28-29 : *As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.*

Commentary

Jesus makes it appear "as if" he had to go elsewhere, alone, into the night.

Just as before he pretended to know nothing, now he pretends to want to leave the disciples. This, too, is part of his clever pedagogy. Let us remember that the disciples still see him as a "stranger", they have not yet recognized him.

Jesus does not impose himself. He waits for a gesture, an invitation.

And the invitation comes and is expressed insistently and in warm words of humanity: *But they insisted: stay with us, for it is nearly evening*; which is equivalent to saying: we don't want you to set out alone, in the darkness of the night, amid the dangers and toils of the road; come with us, we will welcome you into our home; we will open the door for you because we trust you. We will share dinner, you can rest, have a peaceful night. It has been so good to be together along this road; you are no longer a stranger to us, but a friend!

And in the disciples there is also a desire to reciprocate: this stranger gave them words that rekindled them, gave them food for thought, nourishment for the heart, when they were short of ideas and hungry for closeness.

They wish to reciprocate with what they have, with what they can give: some company, a meal together, a safe place to sleep.

I imagine Jesus' happy heart, the joy of feeling welcomed and thus being able to have more time to give himself to the disciples. And the joy above all of discovering that the seeds sown in their hearts had sprouted: the two from Emmaus show by their hospitable words that they understood the heart of Jesus' message: love your neighbor, help him in need, share what you have, open your heart, look at the stranger as you look at a friend.

Let us remember that "man's only greatness is based on love of neighbor" (Boros).

By demonstrating hospitality toward the stranger, when they have not yet recognized Jesus in him, the disciples accomplish what St. Paul recommends in the Letter to the Hebrews: "Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels" (*Hebrews 13:1-2*).

This is something to always remember. These words of Paul give chills when we think of the foreigners we reject.



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Jesus started from here, from hospitality toward everyone and also toward the dark parts, hidden parts within us, toward the darkness and dirt in us, which Jesus knows how to caress with his tenderness, embrace with his mercy.

I also notice another aspect in today's gospel passage: it is the disciples who give to Jesus and he receives from them the gift of hospitality.

Jesus in the gospels repeatedly puts himself in the position of those in need of help: I remember his request for some fresh water to the Samaritan woman at the well and his request for companionship to the disciples during the passion night in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Jesus desires our friendship, our love, our help.

How would the newborn Jesus have survived if he had not relied on the inexperienced hands of the little girl who gave birth to him? Helpless, vulnerable, he was totally dependent on the brave love of his very young mother and the honest and tender conscience of Joseph.

God is a father who promises salvation but comes as a son and asks us to welcome him into our arms, to nurture and cuddle him.

*God needs us.*

This is the greatest and perhaps most difficult mystery to accept: God curling up in my arms, asking me for care and milk to grow in the world.

"He depends on us to love the world and show it how much he loves it" (M. Teresa of Calcutta).  
"Ultimately, it is Christ who loves in us" (Francis, GE, 107 and 21).

We can also offer hospitality to God, tell him: come to my house, I will be happy to have you near; I will share with you what I have, I will tell you about me and listen to what you have to tell me. You will be my closest friend. Come, we both need to embrace each other!

At each of our prayers and Eucharist let us remember to renew this invitation: I open my heart to you, come! Here is room for you, come! My heart is a complete mess, I know, but you love me, come!

This making ourselves hospitable, making space in ourselves for God, with less clutter in our hearts to welcome him, is perhaps the most important thing we can do. Because it all starts from there, from allowing him the space and freedom to act in us.

We can connect this hospitable gesture of offering of the two of Emmaus to two other moments of the Mass: the Apostles Creed and the offering of gifts. In saying *Creed*, I say I *trust*, I want you with me, and I offer you what I have.

"Perhaps we are not used to thinking of the Eucharist as an invitation to Jesus to stay with us. We are more inclined to think of Jesus inviting us to his home, his table, his meal. But Jesus wants to be invited. Without an invitation he will continue on to other places.

It is very important to realize that Jesus never imposes himself on us. Until we invite him, he will always remain a stranger....

The *Creed* is the big yes: Yes, we trust you..." (Nouwen).

And now, since we still have a few minutes, as we have reached the halfway point of our journey today, the third day, I propose to recapitulate the steps we have taken in the footsteps of the two



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disciples over the past few days, looking at the narrative junctures of the passage from Luke's gospel chosen for this conference. It is an exercise, I believe, that holds illuminating surprises for us.

We have read three narrative sequences so far, one per day.

If we observe carefully, we find that each of these sequences is open-ended, that is, its outcome is not a foregone conclusion, but depends on the free choices of the protagonists.

Take the first sequence, which we read on Tuesday: the two disciples argue along the road, Jesus approaches unrecognized and asks a question, to which the two respond.

Jesus asks the question, *"What are these conversations you are having among yourselves along the way?"* What follows this question is not at all obvious. Let's think about it for a moment: the disciples had several options. Faced with the encounter with the stranger and his question there were many possibilities for reaction. They could, for example, have been annoyed by the stranger, feeling him as an intruder (remember they were sad and all caught up in their own affairs, locked in their own problems). To get him out of their way, they could have responded to him rudely (what are you meddling with? These are our things) or politely (so sorry, we don't have time, we're in a hurry) or not responded at all, just have given him an annoyed look, moved to the other side of the street and quickened their pace.

The disciples make a different choice: they are surprised by the impertinent question from the man who seems "out of touch" and decide that he is worth talking to. Jesus throws them the ball and the disciples do not drop it but throw it back. This is a decisive fact because, since the disciples are on a journey, in order to talk to him they must welcome him as a fellow traveler.

Let us now see the third sequence, which we heard today: evening is coming, the disciples invite Jesus to stay with them, and Jesus accepts.

Here, too, we see the disciples at a crossroads in the story: they were not necessarily going to decide to accommodate him. After a nice walk with that stranger who was so fascinating to listen to, they could have politely said goodbye to him, thanked him very much for what he had explained to them, wished him well on his way and a good evening. In this way they would never have recognized him, their paths would have parted, and the story would have ended there.

You see, I am suggesting that you read the gospel as if it were a "fork in the road book" or a game book, those stories that have several possible alternatives that the reader can choose, identifying with a character. His choices condition the unfolding of the plot, landing in multiple endings. These are books that we can group under the formula: "Choose your own adventure."

By immersing ourselves in Luke's narrative, we too can "choose our own adventure." We see that at each "fork in the road" the disciples choose to put themselves on the line, freely opting for the most challenging alternative, which is also the most creative because it produces a new segment of the narrative that has an important transformative function on the lives of the disciples:

- accepting him as a fellow traveler allows them to hear the explanations of Scripture made by Jesus and feel their hearts burning;
- welcoming him to their table as a guest enables the disciples to recognize him.

To pause and think about this is enlightening. It makes us realize how our lives always have an open ending and how we can, through generous and creative choices, change the outcome, and direct us toward the most beautiful ending.



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In a word: the situations, the encounters that life offers us are opportunities to grow in awareness, love and freedom, as Jesus wants us to.

We are free to seize opportunities or not and waste them or make them opportunities for growth. I think each of you would have many testimonies to bring on this. I'll give you a small example.

As I was writing this commentary, in January, I was at home and there was a knock on my door, a foreigner, Maghrebi, who comes occasionally. His name is Khalid and he carries a bag with socks, undershirts and small rugs inside to sell. The first reaction inside me, seeing him - unseen - through the window, was this thought: I pretend I'm not home, I have so much to do! In seven days the commentary for the END congress is due and Khalid is a chatterbox who won't stop!!!

Then another little voice inside me said: but you can't send him away!!! He will be cold, open the door and offer him hot tea!

I listened to item number two, but reluctantly because when I interrupt my writing, it is difficult for me then to get back into focus and I grow anxious that I won't be able to meet deadlines. Between all the magical juggling I have to do to keep my university work, evangelism commitment and being a grandmother of four grandchildren together, even half an hour of missed work becomes a problem...

I opened to Khalid. We sat at the table and it was more than an hour before he left. That hour flew by, I didn't even notice his passing.

Khalid, calmly drinking his hot tea, in no hurry, as if he did not notice my anxiety, told me about his religion. I don't know why the talk immediately fell on this topic. He told me that, according to Islam, he was giving a gift to me at that very moment. I did not understand. Khalid continued, Yes, I am giving you a great gift, because I am giving you a chance to become better, as Allah wants us to be. If I had not come, you would not have had the chance to be hospitable to someone and your heart would have been more closed, and Allah does not like that. But your God does not like it either. Because on this thing I am convinced that your God and my Allah think alike.

What a great teaching! How many times I have discovered pearls of wisdom that have enlightened me in the words of the poor, the foreigners, the believers of other faiths, the uneducated, the different from me.

If you listen to them, they allow you to look at things from another perspective, and this can be enlightening and allow you at the next fork in this exciting and difficult game that is life to make the best choice.

"Our destiny as Christians: giving and begging. To give the gift so that others can give us something.

God wants us to beg from others. He demands of us that our humility take the form of begging. In all situations of life" (Boros).

