

Meditations: Sunday of the Third Week of Easter (Year A)

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during this time of Easter.

- When the light dims on the path of life
- Jesus encounters the disciples returning to their former life in Emmaus
- Recovering our strength in prayer and the sacraments

DURING THESE DAYS of Easter, the liturgy offers us part of Peter's speech to the Israelites on the day of Pentecost. After receiving the gift of

the Holy Spirit, Peter reminds the people that King David had already spoken of Christ's resurrection: *I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand that I may not be shaken; therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; my flesh also will dwell in hope. For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption* (Acts 2:25-27).

The days of the Passion now seem distant. But Peter and the other apostles remember those dark days all too well. For a brief time, everything that had enthused them lost all its meaning. But now, after witnessing the resurrection of Jesus and receiving the Paraclete, they can say with King David: *You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy* (Ps 16:11).

The apostles have come to understand that the path of life is not always illumined with bright light. A moment may come, as in the Passion, when everything seems dark, and sadness tries to overpower us. But the certainty that Christ is alive fills us with hope and restores our joy. This is the security that spurs us to keep going forward even in the midst of darkness. Like the apostles, Christ never abandons us, nor allows us to see corruption, if we let Him guide our lives. “Christ is not someone who has gone, someone who existed for a time and then passed on, leaving us a wonderful example and a great memory. No, Christ is alive. Jesus is the Emmanuel: God with us. His resurrection shows us that God does not abandon his own.”^[1]

THE TWO DISCIPLES from Emmaus failed to recognize at first the light of the resurrection. Amid their sadness they decided to return to the place where they felt safe, to their native town. They chose to put their hope in what they already knew quite well: their home, their work, their personal plans. They had left all that behind to follow Jesus. But now that the One who had given meaning to their generosity had apparently disappeared, they think the only thing left is to return to their previous life.

These disciples, by placing their hope in recovering their past lives, fail to open themselves to the true hope. As they made their way back to Emmaus they had a clear goal in sight, but inside they felt lost. They have heard that some women said they couldn't find the body of Jesus, and that angels told them He is alive. But they don't believe this. Nor does

the confirmation of other disciples who say they have seen the same thing make them change their plans (cf. *Lk 24:22-24*). Hence, when they leave Jerusalem behind and meet our Lord on their way, *their eyes were kept from recognizing him* (*Lk 24:16*). And when Jesus asked them what they were talking about, *they stood still, looking sad* (*Lk 24:17*).

The two disciples' state of mind is the same as that of those who give in to the temptation to turn around on the path already traveled. At first this "new direction" mesmerizes us with "things that are beautiful but illusory, that cannot deliver what they promise, and therefore leave us in the end with a sense of emptiness and sadness. That sense of emptiness and sadness is a sign that we have embarked on paths that were not right, that disoriented us."^[2] But when we stay close to our Lord his light enables us to see beyond the

present moment and continue on the path we began traveling with Him. The momentary darkness and loss of meaning is not definitive, nor is it a good compass when we are disoriented in life. At every moment we have the opportunity to start over, to recognize the Risen Jesus who comes to meet us on the way and gives us true hope – if we accept once again his invitation to listen to Him and follow Him. “Only the Lord can give us confirmation of what we are worth. He tells us this every day from the Cross: he died for us, to show us how precious we are in his eyes. There is no obstacle or failure that can prevent his tender embrace.”^[3]

JESUS is sensitive to the sadness of the two disciples. He listens sympathetically as they open their

heart and reveal the cause of their disappointment: *We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel* (Lk 24:21). Our Lord “understands their sorrow; He sees into their heart and communicates to them a portion of the life dwelling in him.”^[4] He begins explaining to them the true meaning of the Scriptures and how it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things. With each word of Jesus, the two men start to rediscover the joy that had filled their life as disciples. But they still do not recognize our Lord. Only when they see Him break and bless the bread at table will they realize He is the Risen Christ (cf. Lk 24:31).

The two disciples had set out for Emmaus to return to their former way of life. But it was not the thought of their past security that restored their hope, but their encounter with Jesus: *Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road,*

while he opened to us the scriptures? (Lk 24:32). We too, by listening to his words in the Gospel and recognizing his presence in the Eucharist, can once again experience the joy of walking alongside Jesus. A life of sincere prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments allows us to reorient the course of our life when necessary. Our intellect, will and emotions are once again calmly united, and we are renewed by grace. Even when we go through moments of disorientation, Jesus makes himself present again and offers us a deeper meaning for our path in life. If we seek refuge in the love of the Risen Jesus, the awareness of our vocation and mission as disciples will be strongly renewed.

Our Lady also went through times of darkness like the travelers to Emmaus. No one was more deeply hurt and saddened by Jesus' death

than Mary. But her trust in God led her to accept the absence of her Son with hope, placing her assurance in Christ's final victory over death.

“Don’t let discouragement enter into your apostolate. You haven’t failed, just as Christ didn’t fail on the Cross. Take courage! Keep going, against the tide, protected by Mary’s Most Pure and Motherly Heart. *Sancta Maria, refugium nostrum et virtus!*, you are my refuge and my strength.”^[5]

^[1] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 102.

^[2] Francis, Audience, 5 October 2022.

^[3] Ibid.

^[4] Saint Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 105.

^[5] Saint Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, Thirteenth Station, no. 3.

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