

## PART ONE: WALKING WITH CHRIST

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me and that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

The overall title of this prolonged conversation with Jesus, the Resurrected Jesus during this Easter season, is going to and from Emmaus. This celebrated trek from Jerusalem to Emmaus is one of the main themes of Our Lord's life after he's risen from the dead. It is a prominent Gospel narrative of the Resurrection. And like all the events of the Lord's life, they're historic episodes, they also serve as allegories that apply to my personal life, my present circumstances. And I would say that walk to Emmaus and back again to Jerusalem has a very special meaning in our lives because it's an allegory of our discipleship, of the Christian life, of conversion, of evangelization. It condenses, in allegorical form, the tips and turns, the ebbs and flows, of the Christian's life.

And Emmaus, in a sense, has two meanings. One meaning, it's a symbol of disenchantment, discouragement, if not despair itself. Juxtaposed to that image, that meaning, Emmaus is the locale of spiritual energizing, of conversion, of transformation and a zeal to proclaim the resurrection. Heading towards Emmaus, if you will, at least at the beginning, is a sign of defeat. The return from Emmaus is a clear sign of interior and spiritual victory. The punch line, if you will, one of them, anyway, the end result that we will develop more in a later meditation is a point in *The Way* written by St. Josemaria: "Was not our heart burning within us while he spoke to us on the way?" A shared experience recorded by St. Luke, quoted by St. Josemaria, and he comments, "If you are an apostle, these words of the disciples of Emmaus should rise spontaneously to the lips of your professional companions when they meet you along the ways of their lives." That is a culminating point in this walk to and from Emmaus, and that experience of a burning heart symbolizing ardent charity is what we want to draw from the heart of the resurrected Christ.

Let's recreate that scene. Since a retreat is basically a long walk with Christ, with the idea of not learning something new theologically, per se, but with the idea of having a change of heart, a renewed desire for holiness and apostolate and evangelization. This walk to Emmaus is a consequence of profound discouragement - that would be an understatement. They leave on the heels of Jesus' crucifixion outside the walls of Jerusalem. And these disciples, Simon and Cleopas, are completely dejected because they are utterly scandalized and traumatized and sorrowful over the worst kind of torture and execution that the Romans could derive, could invent, only as a deterrent, a severe deterrent, would the Romans crucify criminals. You had to be a heinous criminal or do something egregiously wrong against the state to merit that kind of

punishment, perhaps a sedition, and they devised the most painful kind of death. It was a slow death in Our Lord's case, took a few hours, but many times they would line up the passageways, the roadways, with crucified victims as a deterrent, as a very effective scare tactic, if not a frightening tactic. And just to give it a little perspective, if I'm not mistaken, though early Christians believed profoundly in the cross, they shared in Our Lord's Cross and in many instances in a spectacular way through their martyrdoms. Nevertheless, did not use crucifixes. Crosses, yes, without the body, as artifacts until I think the 6th century. Why? Because it was such a grizzly way to die.

And we have to put our- recreate the sentiments of Jesus' disciples and his apostles. This life of Christ, his public life, it could be a great success story. In many ways it was. Crowds of people would follow him, crowds of people would surround him. And why? A mere wish will cure someone from leprosy; a mere touch will recreate a new arm, from a withered arm to a restored arm instantaneously; a mere rebuke will turn the storm with rough waves crashing into their boat, calm it down in a second; with a mere command, someone dead, probably giving off an unsavory fragrance, comes back to life. His words were in a class all unto themselves. They struck at the heart of the richness of the human person and the potential greatness of the human person with his Beatitudes, with his exhortations to service and humility, constant prayer, mercy and so forth. His divinity which shone forth with his miracle-working, with the authority he commanded among the crowds. He gave them hints by hiding, by running away when they would want to make him king, after feeding thousands and thousands of people with a minimal amount of food, to be exact, five loaves and two fish - this was exciting. And the Lord said, we're going to change the world. And what was that kingdom, was a spectacular kingdom of peace, of freedom, of joy. And his followers couldn't help it - he's the new David. David, the old David, is far inferior to this new David. And Israel will rise again, will shine, will be the most powerful nation. And so, they saw the power of the Lord who by a mere wish can work prodigious events. By mere wish he could lead Israel to greatness again. He made it clear, though. My kingdom is not of this world - it's a kingdom of joy, of peace, of happiness, of love, of humility, of consolation, of reconciliation, forgiveness of salvation, etc.

There were some disturbing hints that he gave predicting his passion. Peter, trying to dissuade him, and didn't exactly get a positive response - "get behind me, Satan." So, there was a hint. And- but the Lord tried to encourage them not to leave their new found way. At the moment of the Transfiguration where his divinity literally had shone forth, where a whole new revelation of the Lord transfigured, giving off bright light. But, tradition has it, the conversation between Elias, Jesus and Moses was about his imminent Passion.

And so, we could reconstruct the sentiments, the experience of his followers from greatness, from being a potential leader and king, to being stripped naked and beaten to death, and humiliated and chained, from thousands of people oohing and aahing at him, attempting to touch a hem of his garment, to being insulted by the high priests, by the populist, by the Romans and his loyal followers - it's so pathetic. His mom, stricken with sorrow and affliction of heart, a young teenage boy who somehow made it to the foot of the Cross holding the hand of the Blessed Mother, some of the holy women who converted after very checkered pass, and that's it. And he's being taunted, "If you're the Son of God, take yourself off the Cross." And he

didn't. And he recited Psalm 22, that those who were there must have been so heart-rending: "My God, my God. Why have you forsaken me?"

But that's just the beginning of the psalm. The psalm at the end rallies to optimism of changing the world. So, we could understand the sentiments of those apostles, feeling they were deceived, being horribly disappointed, being scarred already, traumatized for the rest of their lives, overcome with sorrow because no one was as lovable as the incarnation of mercy, the incarnation of self-giving love who we call Jesus Christ. They lost a friend. They lost a miracle worker. They lost a Savior who made so many promises for the future. This is a team I want to join, but now what do I do? It's- now it's a disgrace to know him. Even his prime Apostle made it very clear that he had nothing to do with him, that weakness. And that was the sentiment. So, what do they do?

Well, they come, these two disciples are from Emmaus, approximately as a crow flies, seven miles away from Jerusalem. I say this almost embarrassingly - I took a bus from Jerusalem to Emmaus, or at least the area of Emmaus, there's a little bit of traffic, but still, I was taking a bus and it took me half hour. Yes, there was traffic, but the bus was moving. So, it was quite a long walk. They were used to it or they had no choice. And so, they were in Jerusalem, the Holy City, the location of the redemption of the fulfillment of all the prophecies. They leave the Holy City and they start to walk back to their home village called Emmaus. And the scandal of the Cross prompts them to go home. This utopian kingdom that looked realistic at the time has been nothing but the worst caught colossal failure imaginable where their hero, where the Son of God made man hangs naked on the Cross. They want to make him king and his crown is a crown of thorns. His- the- the jewels are his wounds in his hands and his side and his feet. They are laughingstock and they got to get- they got to distance themselves from Jerusalem. They can't possibly be associated with- in the eyes of the Romans and the high priest and some of the populace seen as a criminal.

And they march home in object- object discouragement feeling like absolute fools. And so, they return home in defeat. And in this time of anguish, of disillusionment of, if you will, maybe despair as well, they encounter someone. They're unaware of who he is - it's the last person they think they would encounter, but nevertheless, their suffering, their discouragement, their disillusionment attracts this mysterious companion that will not disclose his identity until the end of the trip. And Jesus- it's Jesus of Nazareth, it's the resurrected Jesus, but they can't recognize because now he's glorified and he's recognized when he wills to be recognized.

How does that apply to me? Why is this such a special passage in the Gospel of St. Luke? Why are there many commentaries written about it? Well, for the modern evangelizer, the Holy Father in a talk he gave around Christmas to his collaborators, he said, it's a medieval term, but Christendom has ended, meaning that Christian culture has vanished, Catholic culture is gone. I'm not saying it's formally gone where everybody to a man and woman have formally rejected Catholicism or Christianity, but the culture has changed. Christianity has always been a sign of contradiction. It's- there's never been a period of time where Christianity was always embraced without any push back, without any contradictions. Certain periods of

history are- have accepted Christianity more than others. The modern Christian finds himself or herself a bit alone, a little bit of a laughingstock as well. The indifference towards Christ, such a high percentage of young people who are indifferent, that for them, and no fault of their own, they never had a chance – upbringing, environment, it's not ill will, for their- for all intents and purposes, Jesus never existed.

This access to the Bread of Life, for forgiveness, of meaning, of hope, of joy is absent. The- also, the sufferings and the crosses that crop up in daily life can also shake faith and cause one to question God's love for them or God's presence to them, and they go back to their own version of Emmaus. The efforts to evangelize are never wasted in reality but may seem to be a dead end, can cause someone to go back to their own version of Emmaus. Seeing a society that is not accepting Christianity, is not fertile ground for Christianity, can lead us to believe that Christianity is totally irrelevant and witnessing it and proclaiming it is only going to be an adventure and frustration. We see still, a culture of death with tax on human dignity - whether it's marriage, whether it's unborn life, whether it's suffering life, gender issues and so forth - and we could be tempted to feel that my faith is foolishness. And these experiences, by feeling like that mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds, or like those disciples at the moment of the multiplication of the loaves and the fish, who are we or, what are we among so many?

And so, looking at, well, since we quoted St. Josemaria to look at his life, I quoted from *The Way* - and it's interesting to read *The Way*, using or from the perspective of the historical times in which he wrote *The Way* or compiled those aphorisms. You couldn't tell that he wrote *The Way* at the darkest hour of the history of the Church in Spain, rivaling and surpassing the persecutions of the Church in the early years of the Church's history - 7,000 executions of priests and religious. He founds Opus Dei on October 2, 1928, but his efforts are stymied, to put it mildly, because of this religious persecution and this hatred to the Church. And he can't really get it off the ground in a significant way because of all those obstacles. But to be honest, at least when I read *The Way*, and I read, you know, the whole book, but especially in the chapter on *Faith*, you would think he tasted what the world would call success because it's brimming with optimism, the whole- the whole spirit behind *The Way*.

He also experienced his Emmaus, heading towards Emmaus alone, misunderstood, labeled as a heretic because he said, or that's what he saw, that everyone's called to make Jesus Christ the absolute center, that everybody's called to be a saint. You don't need to leave the world to be a saint, and that the go-to people for evangelization will be the lay people, consecrating the world, transforming the world to Christ. It sounds great, but not when you run smack against a virulent persecution. But the saints are examples of walking with Christ. And, in a certain sense, through the Cross they also don't recognize, in a certain sense, at least with the natural eyes of the mind, that presence of Christ, but they do recognize him through the light of faith, and they walk with him.

Well, we want to draw from all these meditations on the trek to Emmaus is the need to walk with Christ. We notice that they're walking and talking with Christ. It sounds like I'm stating the obvious. Indeed, I am, but it's not totally obvious. We need to pray and imitate Jesus. We need to talk and walk with Christ. And,

the Lord reveals, and we'll develop this more in subsequent meditations, I need to hold the Lord's hand, I need to walk with him. And difficulties in apostolate and evangelization and being holy, in dealing with suffering that is not understood - never totally understood - obstacles, you know, from the heart of my own family to my circle of friends to my neighbors, acquaintances or to the culture itself - I need to walk with Christ who at times I do not see, who seems distant. And what's going on here because of the experience at Calvary, the last person they expected to meet is someone who died a slow, painful death and was buried, and the burial place sealed with the stone. Though they were in the wrong because they had motives of credibility, they will mention that women - the holy women, the women disciples of Jesus - talked about an empty tomb.

In my pastoral work, and I'm winding the meditation down, and I'm blessed with these experiences - I learn from others - where, I'm thinking of two immediate cases where two women had tough experiences, painful experiences. And in two different occasions, in the two different forms of pain, a friend urged them to attend or engage in Eucharistic adoration. And after a while they underwent that transformation. In those moments of discouragement, every moment, but those moments of discouragement, those moments when my faith is tested, when I feel that this program called the Gospel is completely irrelevant - I feel that way, the data tells me that, the culture tells me that, my weakness is telling me that - I need to make that act of faith and walk with Jesus, never let go of him.

I'll finish up with one more point. In this other compilation of aphorisms called *Forge*, St. Josemaria says this, obviously this comes from his own meditations on prayer, "When our vision is clouded, when our eyes have lost their clarity, we need to go to the light. And Jesus Christ has told us that he is the light of the world and that he has come to heal the sick. That is why your weaknesses and your falls, when God allows them, should not separate you from Christ but rather draw you closer to him." Mary, reinforce that sentiment in our hearts and our souls.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and Inspirations you've communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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