**Reflection: The Road to Emmaus and the Synodal Way**

The Road to Emmaus is a great example of the synodal journey. Inspired by our Lenten journey, I have divided this reflection into *Five Stations of the Road to Emmaus*, each one preceded and inspired by a verse or passage of the reading we just heard proclaimed. (Lk 24, 13-35)

**First Station**

*“And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them”* (Lk 24, 15)

Reflection

It is always God who takes the initiative. Jesus takes the first step. He comes forth to meet these two disciples who are returning from Jerusalem all downcast and filled with anxiety and frustration. Jesus actively looks at the reality affecting his disciples and inserts himself in it. Jesus knows his disciples have been traumatized by the death of their teacher, friend, and Lord. His death deeply disturbed them and filled them with fear. The first action Jesus takes in this passage is to join the disciples in their walk. He comes forth to meet them. He reaches out and listens to them.

**Second Station**

*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?” And he replied to them, “What sort of things?”* (Lk 24, 17-19)

Reflection

Jesus gets involved in the conversation. Jesus gets involved in the life of the disciples by asking them about their conversation. Jesus knows full well what happened in Jerusalem. Why, then, does Jesus ask the disciples what they are talking about along the way, as if he himself did not know the answer? In front of their incredulity — “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?”— Jesus patiently asks again: “What sort of things?” The encounter with others, particularly with people who are going through difficult moments, must start by asking about their lives, concerns, hopes, ideas, needs, and dreams. This also allows them to speak about their reality from their own perspective, to share their experiences, their feelings, their ideas. Deep listening creates a space of trust and safety that allows people to quench their thirst and unload their burdens. Jesus is not interested in scolding the disciples for having abandoned him, or for not trusting in his promises. Nor is he interested in reproaching them for not having recognized him. The questions of the stranger invite the disciples to proclaim that Jesus was a powerful prophet in words and deeds before God and before the people. It also allows them to express, and us to realize, the great confusion and pain that the same disciples must have felt in seeing their priests and officials surrendering such a powerful prophet sent by God to his death. They expected him to liberate Israel from the Roman oppression and to restore the glory of the Kingdom of Judea. With the death of Jesus, those dreams are demolished, and the disciples sink into hopelessness. The disciples express their disappointment and probably wonder if it was all worthwhile. That they are returning to the way they lived before meeting Jesus is a sign of their defeated hopes. The fact that they are walking away from Jerusalem is also very symbolic. Think about it… And yet, Jesus is willing to accompany them for a while the “wrong direction” so that, they could, in the end, return to Jerusalem to give testimony.

**Third Station**

*Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures. 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.”* (Lk 24, 27-28)

Reflection

Accompanying. Walking together with Jesus. Jesus does not start the conversation with his disciples by “teaching” them. Most likely, the disciples would have felt very uncomfortable and even annoyed by the intrusion of a stranger coming to “indoctrinate” them at a time of sorrow and confusion. Think about it. How would you feel in a similar situation? That is why Jesus first asks and listens to what the disciples have to say about their own reality, about their way of interpreting the events, which allows them to unburden their hearts and minds on the stranger who joined them along the way. This unburdening makes it possible for the disciples to be ready to listen to what the stranger has to say afterwards. Jesus’ listening attitude helps to create a bond of trust with the disciples. Jesus chooses the most appropriate moment to share with the disciples a very different interpretation of what happened in Jerusalem: “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer those things and enter into his glory?” The power of the Word and its interpretation from this perspective of the Resurrection gradually restores the hope of the disciples as they walk. It prepares them to recognize the Risen Jesus in the stranger that accompanies them and speaks to them, and later breaks bread with them… By giving the impression of continuing on his way, Jesus shows that he does not want to impose himself on the disciples or force them to continue the conversation. It is the disciples now who take the initiative to continue in the company of the stranger. They invite him in: “Stay with us.” And Jesus accepts the invitation to remain with them.

**Fourth Station**

*[W]hile he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him.* (Lk 24:30-31)

Reflection

This is the moment that Jesus most likely anticipated when he came to his disciples and joined them along the way to Emmaus. Jesus is finally with his disciples in a safe space, a place of trust around a table, and ready to share. It is in the gesture of breaking and sharing the bread that the grace of Jesus’ walking with them comes to fruition. The eyes of the disciples are opened and they recognize the Risen Jesus. Now, the “confused travelers on the road to Emmaus” are filled with joy and hope, and they are recommissioned as disciples and missionaries. They immediately return to Jerusalem to share the good news of the Gospel of the Risen Jesus. They are not afraid of the darkness and the perils of the road anymore. Their burning hearts light up the road from within them. Our pastoral work gives us many opportunities to accompany many people in our community of faith and in the periphery. The grace of the Risen One accompanies us as we accompany others. The Encounter with the Risen Lord leads to personal and pastoral conversion.

**Fifth Station**

*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*. (Luke 24, 35)

Reflection

Testimony. Celebrating the joy of being missionary disciples. The last thing Jesus does in this passage is to vanish from the sight of the disciples shortly after they recognized him. However, the disciples do not appear disturbed by it but joyful and ready to give testimony because they recognized Jesus. Their eyes and hearts are now open to the truth of the Resurrection. With astonishment, they exclaim: “Were not our hearts burning . . .?” Their faith was rekindled by first hearing the Word of God. This experience of conversion touches the minds and hearts of the disciples and prepares them to recognize the Risen Jesus in the breaking of the bread. It especially prepares them to understand that they, with the entire community of disciples, constitute now the Body of Christ, the Church in the world. Jesus vanishes from their sight at the exact moment when his disciples no longer need to see him to believe that he is risen. The urgency to meet the rest of the disciples to share with them the great news about the Risen Jesus cannot wait until the following day. The fear, disbelief, doubt, and sadness with which they left Jerusalem only a few hours before, have now completely disappeared from their minds and hearts. As they return to Jerusalem, they see with eyes wide open and are moved by a great joy and hope which are overflowing. This implies making a decision to go forth and reach out to others, to accompany them as the missionary disciples. It implies to live and understand the mission of the Church as a community that goes forth inspired by a commitment to encounter and accompany, following the example of the Lord.

*The reflection* The Five Stations of the Road to Emmaus *is inspired by and incorporates excerpts from the five sessions of the V Encuentro Guide:* [*V-Encuentro-Guide\_English1.6.17.pdf (vencuentro.org)*](https://vencuentro.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/V-Encuentro-Guide_English1.6.17.pdf)*. The sessions follow Pope Francis’ description of “a Church which goes forth” (Evangelii Gadium, 24). Adapted for the purpose of a “synodal reflection” by Mar Muñoz-Visoso.*