



Bible Reflection on Vocations

April 2017 — A Vocation Journey

1. *Read*

Luke 24:13-35

That very day, the first day of the week, two of Jesus' disciples were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. 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?" They said to him, "The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then 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." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while 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, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and

opened the Scriptures to us?” 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 has 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 bread.

(Gospel reading of the Third Sunday of Easter –
Cycle A, April 30, 2017)

2. *Meditate*

Life – especially our spiritual life – has often been described as a journey or road filled with difficulties and dangers. It is a theme that appears in literature – e.g., Ulysses facing the Cyclops and the Sirens in the *Odyssey* or Bilbo Baggins facing Gollum and orcs in J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*.

The “journey” or “way” is also an important theme in the Bible. The Gospel of Mark begins by citing Isaiah 1:2-3, who heralds the “way of the Lord.” Jesus then follows his own journey, which begins in Galilee and ends in Jerusalem.

The author of the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles also uses the journey as a literary and theological theme. The center of his story is the city of Jerusalem. The whole movement of the Gospel of Luke is *toward* Jerusalem, while the movement of Acts is *away from* Jerusalem. In Luke, Jesus’ ministry can be divided into three stages: 1) Galilee (Luke 4:14-9:50); 2) the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem (9:51-19:40); and 3) Jerusalem (19:41-24:53).

Much of what Jesus says and does takes place in the long section of the Gospel which describes the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. It is significant that the first appearance of the Risen Lord takes place on a journey leading *away from* Jerusalem. Since Jesus wants his disciples to remain in the city until the Holy Spirit comes upon them (Luke 24:49), something is not quite right about this journey.

The two disciples were abandoning the Holy City and the company of Jesus’ disciples. Looking “downcast” (Luke 24:17), Cleopas and his companion were disappointed by the death of Jesus. Their hopes “that he would be the one to redeem Israel” (v. 21) had been dashed, so there was no more reason to remain in Jerusalem. They were quitting “the Way.”

Fortunately Jesus himself appeared to the two disciples as they walked away from Jerusalem. They were giving up on him, but he was not about to give up on them: “...Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures” (v. 27).

At supper Jesus “took bread, broke it, and gave it to them” (v. 30). The two disciples recognized him in this act, but immediately Jesus

vanished. Finally they understood why their hearts were burning “while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us” (v. 32). All their disappointment, despondency, and sorrow disappeared. So did their desire to quit the company of Jesus’ disciples. They immediately returned to Jerusalem, for they felt compelled to share their experience with the other disciples.

It took 22 verses for the two companions to travel away from Jerusalem and to recognize their error. It took only half a verse, however, for them to return in joy and to recount to the others “what had taken place on the way” (v. 35). They were so excited that they hardly noticed the return trip.

We do not know when or how Cleopas and his companion had been called by Jesus to follow him. Obviously their experience on the road to Emmaus was not their first encounter with Jesus – although it was their first encounter with the Risen Lord. Were they present when Jesus spoke of the hardships that were a normal part of discipleship? In Luke 9:23, Jesus informs his disciples that “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” In Luke 9:58, Jesus deliberately tries to dampen a volunteer’s enthusiasm: “Foxes have dens and birds of the sky have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to rest his head.” In Luke 9:62, Jesus harshly responds to another would-be disciple: “No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.” In Luke 12:51, Jesus announces that he has come not to establish peace but division. Cleopas and his companion certainly must have known that there would be difficulties in following Jesus.

Jesus’ passion and death dealt a mortal blow to their vocation. They needed a powerful experience of the Risen Lord in order to overcome the temptation to quit – a normal temptation when we face difficulties in our vocation.

A Scripture lesson and an experience of Eucharist helped them to experience the presence of the Risen Lord and to recover the grace of their own vocation. That experience of Jesus walking with them, talking with them and eating with them healed their disappointment and doubt.

There was no need to quit and to go home. Rather, they had the energy and motivation to return “home” to the community of disciples in Jerusalem. They had a mission to share with the other disciples the Good News that Jesus was alive and had appeared to them.

In our own age difficulties and doubts often produce the temptation to quit the spiritual journey to which we have been called. May our own experiences of the Risen Lord help us to persevere in our vocation and to be faithful to that mission to which the Lord has called each of us.

3. *Pray*



**St. Anne
Mother of Mary
Grandmother of Jesus**

A Vocation Prayer to St. Anne

St. Anne, worthy mother of the immaculate spouse of the Holy Spirit, this same Holy Spirit blessed you with outstanding gifts of grace and holiness. Ask the Holy Spirit to send many qualified workers into the vineyard of the Lord. Grant to all Catholic families the spirit of piety and self-denial and give to all who answer the divine call true humility and a living faith. May the Spirit work in them with grace and make them useful ministers of the eternal high priest. Amen.

(Vademecum SVD)

4. *Contemplate*

Call to mind the journey of your own vocation and thank Jesus for always being with you along the way. 5. Act

5. *Act*

- Pray for bishops, priests, deacons and religious Brothers and Sisters who are encountering difficulties in their vocations.
- Pray for the gift of perseverance for yourself, a confrere, a priest or religious whom you know or a candidate in a formation program.

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