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Luke's Resurrection Symphony in 4 Movements

Biblical Reflection for the 3rd Sunday of Easter

By Father Thomas Rosica, CSB

TORONTO, APRIL 22, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- I often consider Chapter 24 of Luke's Gospel to be a Resurrection Symphony in four brilliant movements.

The first movement is the story of the women at the tomb, which ends with Peter's visit to the tomb to check it (verses 1-12). The second movement tells the great story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, culminating in their learning that the Lord had also appeared to Peter (verses 13-35). The third movement is the appearance of the Lord to his disciples at a meal, ending with their commissioning by Jesus (verses 36-49). And the fourth movement -- Jesus' ascension into heaven (verses 50-52).

The most well-known of these stories is the Emmaus episode that begins in verse 13. It serves as a transition between the events of the Passion and discovery of the tomb and the appearance tradition. It is different from the other resurrection appearances because the Lord disappears at the moment of recognition. The Emmaus narrative (24:13-35) serves as a bridge between the empty tomb (24:1-12) and Jesus' self-revelation to his apostles (24:36ff.) immediately following the Emmaus disciples' meal, their recognition of Jesus, and hasty return to Jerusalem.

Cleopas and his companion are going away from the locality where the decisive events have happened, toward a little village of no significance. They did not believe the message of the Resurrection, due to the scandal of the cross. Puzzled and discouraged, they are unable to see any liberation in the death, the empty tomb, or the message about the appearances of Jesus to the others. In their eyes, either the mission of Jesus had entirely failed, or else they, themselves, had been badly deceived in their expectations about Jesus.

As the two downtrodden disciples journeyed with Jesus on that Emmaus road, their hearts began to gradually catch fire within them as they came to understand with their minds the truth about the suffering Messiah. At the meal in Emmaus, they experienced the power of the Resurrection in their hearts. The solution to the problem of these two disciples was not a perfectly logical answer.

Emmaus at the synod

The most frequently quoted Gospel story at the October 2008 synod on the Word of God was undoubtedly Luke's account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13:35). Cited by cardinals, bishops, experts and special guests in many of the presentations coming from every corner of the earth, the Emmaus story proved once again to be a great model or paradigm for catechesis, teaching, Bible study and above all for Christian living.

The journey motif of the Emmaus story (and one can say of the entire synod on the Word of God) is not only a matter of the distance between Jerusalem and Emmaus, but also of the painful and gradual journey of words

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that must descend from the head to the heart; of a coming to faith, and a return to a proper relationship with the stranger who is none other than Jesus the Lord.

Eating and drinking with Jesus

The Gospel for the Third Sunday of Easter (Year B) is the continuation of the Emmaus story -- how God always leads people into an experience of community and table fellowship (Luke 24:36-48). There are several aspects of the story -- the appearance of Jesus among the startled and frightened disciples (verses 36-43) and the words about the fulfillment of Scripture and commissioning of the disciples (verses 44-48). Many elements that were present in the Emmaus story are made more explicit. The Lukan stories also represent the Risen Lord as the One who receives hospitality and food from the disciples. Only after the disciples have extended an invitation to the Stranger to remain with them is it possible for full recognition to take place. They were unable to fully recognize him on the road, but they did recognize him in the breaking of the bread.

Table fellowship reveals the depth of humanity. The touching, human scene of Jesus taking bread and fish and eating it with his disciples drives home the fact that ghosts don't eat -- humans do -- and it reassures the disciples that the Risen Lord is truly in their midst. No theological or dogmatic assertion will prove this to them. Rather, the striking humanity of Jesus, at table, will finally convince them that he is alive.

In spite of the testimony from the women and the two travelers, the disciples still could not believe their eyes when Jesus appeared before them. Only Jesus could validate the experience and supply its proper understanding. Jesus would first prove their experience was no hoax. Like the appearance to Thomas in John's Gospel, Jesus showed his wounds and challenged his followers to "touch" him. The experience of the Risen Lord was tactile. Jesus has substance, unlike a ghost. Unlike John 20, Jesus showed his followers his hands and feet (not his hands and side). Luke inferred that Jesus had been nailed in his feet.

Today's passage also parallels John 21 with the subject of the cooked fish. In John 21:9-14, Jesus was cooking the fish. In Luke, the disciples gave Jesus the cooked fish to eat. If Luke 13:35-48 is combined with the narrative from the Road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35), both stories involved the breaking of bread (Luke 24:30, 35 and John 21:13). The most notable narratives with the blessing of bread and fish were the multiplication of the loaves and fishes (Mark 6:30-44, 8:1-9; Matthew 14:13-21, Matthew 15:32-39; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14). A meal that featured fish and bread was common around the Sea of Galilee and in Jerusalem. Such meals were a regular part of life on the road with Jesus and his followers.

The real heart of the story, however, is not the meal but the quality of the appearance or vision. Jesus appeared as a living, solid form. The Holy and Divine could be found in the tangible. Holiness was not only a matter of ecstasy, touching the transcendent, while leaving the world behind. God reached his people through his creation, not in spite of it. This insight became the foundation of the Church's self-awareness as the Body of Christ. It also grounded worship in the Church as sacramental. The believer encounters the Risen Christ through the bodily senses. His followers saw, touched, and heard the Risen One. We see, hear, and touch Christ today through the sacraments, through shared witness and service to others.

The Eucharist is a summary of Jesus' life, a call to lay down one's life for others. The breaking of bread is also a powerful sign of unity. When we break bread, it is a means of sharing in the body of Christ. Paul says, "Because there is one bread ... we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (I Corinthians 10:16-17).

It is not only that the person sharing the cup and the broken bread establishes a union with Christ: A further union is established through the "partaking" of the same loaf -- the union between all the members of the celebrating community. The unity expressed here is not just a matter of human conviviality; it is a gift given in the breaking of bread, a sharing in the body of Christ. The Eucharist makes the members of the body

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celebrate their oneness, a oneness experienced on three levels: one in Christ, one with each other, and one in service to the world.

The sacramental encounter of young people with Christ

Allow me to share a final thought with you about eating and drinking with Jesus.

During the synod on the Word of God, one of the memorable interventions was made by Salesian Father Pascual Chávez Villanueva, president of the Union of Superiors-General and Rector of the Salesian Society of St. John Bosco. Father Pascual, whose Salesian Congregation has a special charism for working with young people, offered the Emmaus story as model of bringing the Word of God closer to the world of youth. He drew our attention to the fact that young people today share very few things with the two disciples on the road but perhaps nothing as much as the frustration of their dreams, the fatigue in their faith and the disenchantment in discipleship.

"Young people need a Church that meets them there where they are. Arriving to Emmaus, the disciples still did not recognize the person of Jesus. What Jesus was unable to do in accompanying them, conversing with them, interpreting the Word of God, he accomplished with the Eucharistic gesture. An education in faith which forgets or postpones the sacramental encounter of young people with Christ, is not a secure, efficient way to find him."

Those final words have remained with me. How do we teach young people the importance of the sacraments in their own lives? How do we provide opportunities for young people to encounter Christ? Do we not open the door to this importance and foster such encounters by beginning with simple table fellowship with young people?

It is often the very ordinary moments of table fellowship that bring about the realization that we are human, loving, loveable and genuinely interested in others, their tribulations, their hopes and their futures. Table fellowship does indeed reveal the depth of humanity, and the depth of compassion. It is a springboard to adult faith, and to a living encounter with the Risen Lord who wishes to share his own life with us each day. Stay with us, Lord!

[The readings for this Sunday are Acts 3:13-15, 17-19; 1 John 2:1-5a; Luke 24:35-48.]

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On the Net:

Salt and Light Catholic Television Network Web site: www.saltandlighttv.org

Road to Emmaus: www.youtube.com/watch?v=SST_WDWKxwA&feature=related

www.saltandlighttv.org/prog_slprog_snl_presents_easter_video3.html

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In French:

Reste avec nous, Seigneur:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZpBnPekgH04&feature=channel_page

www.seletlumieretv.org/program_speciales_easter_video3.html

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