

3 Easter A SML 2023 LK 24:13-35

Going to Emmaus probably sounded like a good idea at the time because Jerusalem was filled with bad memories; memories of:

- ✓ pain,
- ✓ defeat,
- ✓ humiliation,
- ✓ and most of all, death,
- ✓ death by crucifixion.

Going anywhere sounded better than staying in Jerusalem.

Why not Emmaus? Maybe in Emmaus:

- ✓ things would be better,
- ✓ the pain would subside,
- ✓ the memories would fade,
- ✓ and in general, things would be different.

There was only one problem – there was NOTHING in Emmaus.

Why Emmaus? Where is Emmaus? To this very day, scripture scholars and historians dispute the location of the village named Emmaus. The fact is the two disciples weren't so much trying to get TO Emmaus as much as they were

trying to get AWAY FROM Jerusalem. And the defining distance, seven miles, FROM Jerusalem, sounded like a safe distance. In scripture, the number seven tends to be a good number. Seven represents fullness, completeness and perfection:

- ✓ Creation took seven days.
- ✓ The walls of Jericho fell after seven days of trumpet blasting.
- ✓ Jesus told Peter to forgive seventy times seven times.
- ✓ The Book of Revelation tells us the seventh trumpet will signal the end of time.

So seven miles seemed like a good safe distance from Jerusalem, the place where Jesus' ministry ended. Jerusalem is where He was:

- ✓ betrayed,
- ✓ arrested,
- ✓ denied,
- ✓ abandoned,
- ✓ scourged,
- ✓ crowned with thorns,
- ✓ carried His cross,
- ✓ crucified

- ✓ and buried.

So yes, Jerusalem was a place to get away from, as far as possible.

We are fortunate to have the story of these two disciples on the road to Emmaus. We're all on the road from somewhere to somewhere. We've all experienced pain and loss in life. We all have our Jerusalems, those places where we once walked with Our Lord but now associate with losing Him. We all have our Emmauses too – those places we run to in order to put a safe distance between ourselves and the pain we encountered.

Everyone incurs pain. Following Our Lord involves pain. In Baptism, a commitment was made for us to follow, and in Confirmation, we confirmed that commitment to follow Jesus, and following Jesus leads us to Jerusalem.

The story of the Road to Emmaus teaches to:

- ✓ embrace pain and suffering,
- ✓ acknowledge it,
- ✓ deal with it,
- ✓ and be healed by it.

Emmaus sounds like a good safe place to go, but the only thing you'll find in Emmaus is the pain you tucked away in

your suitcase, and as soon as you arrive in Emmaus, you unpack it.

For myself, I encountered my Road to Emmaus in 1997 after a year's bout with depression. I decided to take a leave of absence from the active priesthood and my Road to Emmaus was the Road to Roanoke, VA, where I lived the life of a lay man:

- ✓ got jobs in the not for profit and then corporate sectors,
- ✓ on call hospital chaplain
- ✓ active in my parish of St. Andrew.

But for the four years I lived in Emmaus, or in my case, Roanoke, I knew I had packed my priestly talents in a suitcase, buried my talent as a priest in the sand. In my prayer and at Mass in Roanoke, where I encountered the Lord on the road with me, I was haunted by the Parable of the Talents and the story of the Rich Young Man, and I came to realize I needed to return to Jerusalem, to return to the priesthood, and I'm glad I did.

My story of depression and walking the Road to Roanoke has a happy ending as does the Road to Emmaus. But the bottom line is I experienced the pain of depression and lost my sense of direction. If you have lost your sense of direction,

you and I are not alone. We're in very good company. Look at all the biblical greats from scripture who lost their sense of direction at one time or another:

- ✓ Abram and Sarai had no idea where Canaan was; God had to show them.
- ✓ Jacob's son Joseph was lost in a cistern and then in the foreign land of Egypt.
- ✓ The Israelites were lost in the slavery of Egypt.
- ✓ Moses and the Israelites were lost for 40 years in the desert.
- ✓ Jonah was lost in the belly of a whale
- ✓ The people of Israel were lost in exile in Babylon.
- ✓ The disciples were lost at sea during a storm.
- ✓ The Prodigal Son was lost in the land of famine.
- ✓ A certain sheep in a flock of 100 was lost.
- ✓ Paul was lost in a shipwreck at sea.

Knowing these Biblical greats and everyone else who's ever been lost before now may be a small consolation, but the greater consolation is knowing Jesus came to seek and to find the lost. (LK 19:10) We just need to admit that we're lost. Those who are healthy do not need a doctor. The sick do. Those who admit they are lost, need Jesus.

Jesus did not accidentally happen upon the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus. As the Good Shepherd who looks for those who are lost, Jesus constantly patrols the Roads to Emmaus for those who have lost their sense of direction. And, as the Good Shepherd, He rejoices more over the one who is lost and found than over the 99 who did not stray.

If you haven't walked the road to Emmaus, someday you will. You'll think the only viable solution is to move on. And there's nothing wrong with moving on. There is a difference between running away and the transition to move on. But more often than not, God will meet us on the Road to Emmaus, or in Emmaus, itself:

- ✓ to reevaluate,
- ✓ make the necessary adjustments,
- ✓ and head right back to Jerusalem.

And because Jesus is so smart, you need not walk the Road to Emmaus to be found. He would have found them just as forlorn had they stayed in Jerusalem.

For me, the Psalmist words it best:

You guide me along the right path, for the sake of your name. Even though I walk through the dark valley, I fear

no evil, for you are at my side, with your rod and your staff, that give me courage. (PSM 23:3-4)