

## Eucharist and life

Jesus lives among us in the Eucharist, in which his real and historical presence is realized in a supreme way. Among the uncertainties and distractions of daily life, imitate the disciples on their journey to Emmaus, and, like them, tell the Risen Lord who reveals himself at the breaking of bread, “Stay with us, it is nearly evening and the day is almost over” (Lk 24, 29). Invoke Jesus, so that on the ways of the today’s many Emmaus, he may remain always with us. Let him be your strength, your reference point. Let him be your eternal hope. Dear youths, let the Eucharistic bread never be missing on the banquets of your existence. From this bread you can draw the strength to witness to your faith! Around the Eucharistic banquet the harmonious unity of the Church is realized, a mystery of missionary communion, in which all feel to be sons and brothers, without differences of race, language, age, social and cultural class. Dear youths, do give your generous and responsible contribution to edify constantly the Church as a family, a place of dialogue and reciprocal welcoming, a space of peace, of mercy and forgiveness. Enlightened by the Word and fortified by the bread in the Eucharist, dearest youths, you are called to be credible witnesses of the Gospel of Jesus who makes everything new.

*John Paul II*

### Final prayer

“God, our Father,  
who in your Son Jesus Christ  
have wanted to make yourself a companion of the  
disciples on the way to Emmaus,  
in order to chase away their doubts and uncertainties,  
and to reveal Your presence in the breaking of bread,  
open our eyes that they may see Your presence,  
enlighten our mind  
that we may understand Your Word,  
enkindle in our hearts  
the fire of the Spirit  
that we may find the courage of becoming  
joyful witnesses of the Risen Lord,  
Jesus Christ, Your Son and our Lord. Amen”.

cards of formation



*“they recognised him at the  
breaking of bread”*

Lk 24, 35

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To the re-discovery  
of the mystery of the Eucharistic

6

## To begin...



One of the most evocative passages of the Gospel is certainly that of the Emmaus Disciples.

For certain motives it is also one that most adheres to our reality of persons on a journey, definitely with many uncertainties, but often victims of doubts, perplexity, interrogatives and desires.

The Eucharist is the turning key of these two disciples, but also our own. Jesus has kindled their heart and they now can no longer repress their ardour: they feel the need of sharing it with others. To know that Jesus in the Eucharist asks our collaboration to reach other men is a source of emotion and responsibility.

After meeting the Lord and after recognising him at the breaking of bread, the two disciples of Emmaus return to the community which they had left with a heart full of sadness. They return there to announce that he, the risen Lord, is present in the daily journey of each disciple of his.

*(Card. Carlo Maria Martini)*

## To reflect

*From the Encyclical Ecclesia de Eucharistia, by John Paul II.*

To contemplate Christ involves being able to recognize him wherever he manifests himself, in his many forms of presence, but above all in the living sacrament of his body and his blood. *The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist*; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened. The Eucharist is both a mystery of faith and a “mystery of light”. Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: “their eyes were opened and they recognized him” (Lk 24:31).

The saving efficacy of the sacrifice is fully realised when we receive the body and blood of Christ. The Eucharistic Sacrifice is by itself oriented to the intimate union of the faithful with Christ through the communion: we receive the One who has offered himself for us, his body which He surrendered on the Cross for us, his blood which He “poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt. 26,28). We remember his words: “As the living Father sent me and I draw life from the Father, so whoever eats me will also draw life from me” (Jo 6,57). Jesus himself assures us that such a union, stated by Him in analogy with the Trinitarian life, truly comes true.

## **SIGNS AND GESTURES to be re-discovered**

The sign of the breaking of bread

In the celebration, he who presides repeats the gestures of Christ: the preparation of the gifts, the Eucharistic prayer, with the giving of thanks in memory of the death and resurrection of Jesus and with the invocation of the Holy Spirit, his offered body and the blood of the covenant: Jesus makes himself present in his passage from this world to the Father, in order to unite for ever in the covenant God and men. The broken bread and the wine are given to the invitees to the banquet of the Lord, thus they share the body and blood of the Lord to become a living offering and a sign of loving communion with God and with men.

## To meditate

From the *Sermons* of St. Augustine, Bishop (235, 1-3)

After his Resurrection, the Lord Jesus met on the way two of his disciples who were speaking between themselves on what had happened, and told them: “*What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along*” (Lk 24,17).

This Gospel passage gives us a great lesson, if we understand it correctly. Jesus appears, shows himself to the disciples but is not recognised. The Master accompanies them on the way and He himself is the Way; they, however, are not yet on the true way: when Jesus meets them they had already lost the Way. When he lived with them, before his passion, he had predicted them everything: the sufferings, the death, the resurrection on the third day. He had announced everything, but his death had made them to lose the memory.

*Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free* ((Lk 24,21). How is it, disciples, that you hoped and now do not hope anymore? Christ is alive and your hope has died? Yes, Christ lives. But the living Christ has found the hearts of his disciples dead. He appears to their eyes and they do not see him: he shows himself and yet remains hidden. If he did not show himself, how could they feel his question and answer him? He walks with them and it seems that he follows them: in reality, it is he who guides them. They see him, but do not recognise him, *their eyes*, the text says, *were unable to recognise him* (Lc 24, 16).

Well, brothers, when has Jesus wanted to manifest himself? *At the breaking of bread* (Lk 24, 35). We can be sure: we recognise the Lord by breaking the bread. He has not wanted to be recognised if not at this moment for our sake, that we would not see him in his flesh and yet we would eat his flesh, Christian, whoever you are and you do not bear this name all in vain, do not enter the Church uselessly, you who listen with fear the word of God, do find your consolation in the breaking of bread. Believe, and the one whom you do not see is with you. When Jesus was speaking the disciples did not have faith and, not hoping of seeing him risen, they did also not hope of being able to live anew. They had lost their faith, they had lost their hope. They were dead persons walking with a living being; they were dead and yet walked with Life. If you want life, do what they have done and you will recognise the Lord. They have welcomed the stranger: the Lord like a traveller that goes far, and they have let him join their conversation. When they reached their destination, they asked him to stay with them and said, “*it is nearly evening, and the day is almost over*” (Lk 24,29). Give hospitality to the stranger, if you want to meet the Saviour. Hospitality returned to them all that they had lost by doubting. The Lord manifested his presence in the act of breaking the bread.

## The Word of God

*From the Gospel according to Luke (Lk 24, 13-35)*

*That very same day, two of them were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. And it happened that, as they were talking together and discussing it, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but their eyes were prevented from recognising him. He said to them: “What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?”. They stopped, their faces downcast, then one of them, called Cleopas, answered him: ‘You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.’ He asked: ‘What things?’ They answered: ‘All about Jesus of Nazareth, who showed himself a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have now gone by since it all happened; some women from our group have astounded us; they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.’*

*Then he said to them: ‘You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into his glory?’ Then starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the Scriptures that were about himself.*

*When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them saying, ‘It is nearly evening and the day is almost over’. So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other: ‘Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?’ They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven assembled together with their companions who said to them: ‘The Lord has indeed risen and has appeared to Simon’. Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.*

## SIGNS and GESTURES to be rediscovered

The sign of the Word

Listening to the Word with the Church, like the disciples of Emmaus, before sitting at table with the Lord, we accept that he illumines our life with the word of the Scriptures that announces to us the fulfilment of salvation in the death and resurrection of Christ. We recognise more and more the true face of God, his project on us and on humanity. Many times the Eucharist leaves no sign, does not build our personality, only because there hasn't been the effort of listening to Jesus.

## Self Formation

### The experience of the Emmaus disciples

One of the most evocative passages of the Gospel is certainly that of the Emmaus Disciples. For certain motives it is also one that most adheres to our reality of persons on a journey, definitely with many uncertainties, but often victims of doubts, perplexity, interrogatives and desires.

Let us then try to actualise the proclamation and simultaneously let us catch the main elements that favour an understanding, an interiorisation and, therefore, a deep, authentic assimilation of the theological message that it contains in relation with the Eucharist. This very particular episode becomes a sign for all: Jesus nears us on our journey, explains the Word to us, breaks the bread of the Eucharist.

Luke presents to us a wonderful picture. He describes the life of those who want to encounter Jesus. This journey includes a going and a coming back; a walking and a being sitting at table; there is a delusion but also a joy that fills the heart. Finally a crowning of the whole, the encounter with the brothers, just as if everything else were a preparation for this staying together.

The mysterious companion of those two young men who were moving towards Emmaus, opens new perspectives in their mind; it helps to read in its depth and with new eyes. Everything is restored to its sense starting from his words. But, along with the Scripture, there is another sign from which we can recognise the presence of the risen Lord among us; it is the "Eucharistic" sign of the breaking of bread.

Let us linger a while above all on the last experience that they live; they recognise Jesus at the breaking of bread. In fact, though it was a normal supper, the one to which the unknown pilgrim was invited on that far off Easter day, the gestures he made certainly alluded to a Eucharistic celebration: "*When he was at table with them, he took bread said the blessing, broke it and gave it to them*" (v30). It is evidently a reference of Luke to the institution of the Eucharist (see 22, 19).

The encounter closes with this last deed and it is strengthened. The word and the bread are all that make up the Eucharist. In it our eyes are opened and we recognise who Jesus is. It is in the intimacy of supper that Jesus allows himself to be recognised: "their eyes were opened". We reach faith through experience, understood as an encounter with the Saviour. The disciple recognize him at the breaking of bread: "*Their eyes were opened and they recognised him*. But he had vanished from their sight."(v31). When

they went back to Jerusalem, they narrated the happening to the eleven, and said again that *they had recognised him at the breaking of bread* (v.35). It was, therefore, considered as a characteristic gesture of the Lord, bound to some particularly solemn moment of his life: we are once again taken back to the last supper, with the "unique thing" Jesus introduced in it outside the normal Passover eating.

"It is noteworthy that the narration of the encounter of the disciples with the risen Lord on the way to Emmaus end with the words: he was recognised at *the breaking of bread*. In the Eucharistic celebration the community of the faithful gathers for the reading of the Sacred Scripture, to pronounce the profession of faith and to break the bread. Through the presence of the Lord that realises with the breaking of bread, God grants that the Risen Lord be recognised. In this way, beside its efficacy of disclosing the Paschal Mystery to man, the feast is itself a radiation of the mystery. Faith is an effect of the act with which God has resurrected Christ. It is, therefore, both cause and effect, proposing the encounter with the resurrection and operating it at the same time."

The adhesion to Jesus expresses the adhesion to the Christian community, without which the community cannot exist. After encountering the Lord and after having recognised him at the breaking of bread, the two disciples of Emmaus, go back to the community which they had abandoned with a heart full of sorrow. Community life offers a climate of faith and charity that supports the testimony together with prayer.

The Eucharist is the turning key of these two men. A new conscience of mission is born from here. They jump up on their feet all of a sudden, leave half of their supper behind and run to Jerusalem. That Jesus who *was* a prophet, who was expected to set Israel free, who was killed on the cross had now appeared to them, had walked with them and had broken the bread for them.

Jesus has inflamed their heart and they cannot contain their ardour any longer; they feel the need of announcing it to others. To know that Jesus asks our collaboration to reach other men is for us a source of emotion and responsibility. This is the teaching for us today: to spring up standing, to quit the banquet, to run into the darkness and shout to all, "The Lord is truly risen! We have seen Him!"

### SIGNS and GESTURES to be rediscovered

#### The sign of the assembly

The Eucharist is an act of the community for which it is celebrated together: the sign of breaking the bread sends us back to a community, constituted by those whom God has called to be brothers in Baptism. It is the assembly that celebrates the Eucharist as a community gathered by the Spirit under the presidency of our ordained ministers. It is an assembly of sinners; but it is also an assembly that allows itself to be built more and more in the body of Christ. After the Consecration, praying the Father with these words, "Give the fullness of your Spirit to us who nourish ourselves with the body and the blood of your Son, so that we may become in Christ one body and one spirit", the minister expresses this reality.