



WEEK 1: LUKE 24

Scripture: Luke 24

Instructions: On the first day you pray with this guide, use the whole chapter for your prayer time. Then, highlight the sections, verses, or even phrases that strike you and spend subsequent days going more in-depth into those passages: why is God calling you to focus your attention there? Let these words sit with you even after your prayer time, and let God continue to speak to you through them throughout your day.

Reflection from Archbishop Aquila:

You can watch Archbishop's video reflections at archden.org/easter2021

Welcome to week one of our *Encounter the Risen Jesus* initiative. This week, I am inviting you to pray with Luke 24, a chapter of this great Gospel that covers the Resurrection events through the Ascension. This first week is a powerful one, an entire octave of solemnities; I am praying it is a blessed beginning to our Easter journey.

I look forward to how God will speak to you through your prayer each day with this chapter, but I would also like to offer a few brief reflections of my own. There are many incredible encounters with the reality of the Resurrection in these passages: the women, who come to the tomb with spices, sure they will care for Jesus' corpse, and who return, sent by an angel, with a proclamation that Jesus is indeed alive, he is risen as he said. Peter, running to the tomb, wonder beginning to fill his mind and heart at the possibility that the last three years of his life were not, in fact, wasted, that Jesus is exactly who he said he was. All the disciples, together, seeing Jesus in the upper room and watching him eat fish, testifying to his bodily Resurrection.

However, I want to focus on one remarkable encounter: that of the two disciples with Jesus on the road to Emmaus. I want you to journey with them, be attentive to all that Jesus speaks, reflect on the new vision given to both disciples throughout the journey,

and specifically highlight the Eucharist's importance in this encounter.

You might remember this story well. It opens with two disciples, leaving Jerusalem to walk the seven miles back to Emmaus. One common tradition that I could suggest as a possibility is that these two disciples are a married couple: Cleopas and his wife, Mary. How did this tradition develop? For one, Cleopas is mentioned by name as one of the two. Why do we think the other disciple might be Mary, his wife? It stands to reason that his wife is traveling with him since we know she has been in Jerusalem for the previous week's events. John's Gospel even explicitly mentions her as one of the women who remained at the foot of the cross, "Standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleopas, and Mary of Magdala." (John 19:25).

It is hard to say precisely on what they are conversing and debating. Perhaps Cleopas does not believe Mary Magdalene's account of the angel's appearance and the testimony she brought that Christ was alive. On the other hand, undoubtedly, his wife Mary's proven faithfulness, having stayed at the foot of the cross, might testify to her openness to more readily believe. Perhaps they are arguing, as a married couple might, because she does not want to go back to Emmaus but wants to wait in Jerusalem for Christ to appear. On the other hand, Cleopas might be too discouraged, too wounded, to even hope in that possibility.

They then encounter a man along the road and begin a conversation with him about all that has happened in Jerusalem, about the crucifixion of Jesus, and now the testimony that he is risen. One can sense their doubt of all this could be real. The man, who is Jesus, begins with Moses and the prophets and explains the Scriptures to them. Then the climax of the story comes when, having arrived at their destination, Jesus, to them still a mysterious stranger, stays with them for dinner and, "took...blessed...broke...and gave," to them bread. This language should be immediately familiar to those of us who have experienced the Eucharistic Prayer in the Mass and, indeed, hearkens to the Last Supper when Jesus instituted the Eucharist. Stunningly, it is at this moment that "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him" (Luke 24:31).

The reality, brothers and sisters, is that there are many ways and places to encounter Jesus Christ. However, the preeminent place where Christ wants to meet us most personally and most intimately, the place he has instituted to be, "with (us) always, to the end of the age," is in the Eucharist, at the Mass. We see in Emmaus the two great movements of the Mass, the Word of God and the Eucharist. Let us never take for granted, or fail to be humbled by this mystery, that, in the Blessed Sacrament, what has been made available to us uniquely as Catholics is what J.R.R Tolkien once described as, "the one great thing to love on earth!"

This story points to the centrality of the Eucharist for our Catholic faith and the primacy

for our personal encounters with the risen Jesus. It should be a reminder to us and all Catholics to never forget that the “source and summit” of our faith is truly Jesus, fully present, body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist. We receive the second Person of the Trinity each time we receive Communion. Ponder that!

Reflecting on this deeply Eucharistic passage should make us want to spend more time with Jesus in Eucharistic adoration. Many parishes in our archdiocese have perpetual adoration chapels and, by creating a regular habit of adoration, we discover the impact that coming face-to-face with the living God can have on our lives. A great story comes to mind from the life of St. John Vianney, when he was a parish pastor in Ars, France. One of his parishioners would spend hours each day, after working the fields, sitting in his small church, just staring at the tabernacle. Noticing this habit over a period of time, Vianney finally chose to approach the man and ask him what he was doing. The man pondered, for a second, as if he never expected he would have to explain, and then looked back at this great saint and priest, saying simply, “I sit here and look at him, and he sits there and looks at me.” What an amazing way to describe the gift of prayer and especially adoration.

Furthermore, many in the Scriptures have encounters with Jesus. Many hear his teaching and see him do miracles. The difference of a real encounter with Christ truly changes our lives, so that our eyes are opened and our faith is confirmed like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus.

Many wonder why some articles of the faith that are so clear to them and easy to believe are so difficult to grasp for a friend or family member. This ability to have our eyes opened in an encounter with Christ, the gift of faith, is itself a grace. It is Jesus’ own unpacking of the Scriptures on the road that opens their minds in such a way that they later recount that their hearts were “burning within us” the whole time. There is a deep resonance with the truth that our souls all long for, and it is this *lumen fidei*, the light of faith, that Christ alone can give, which opens our eyes to see the truth of who he is.

Our openness, however, to receiving this gift is required. In fact, how many times in Scripture do we see a declaration of faith or a petition precede Jesus’ miracles. We must pray for the grace of receptivity! Toward the end of their journey on the road, Christ gave them the “impression that he was going on further,” yet it was their persistence that compels him to stay. Without them inviting him, the high point of this encounter with him, in the breaking of the bread, would never have happened. “Stay with us!” they plead, and he obliges. In fact, this encounter was Christ’s intention and desire all along, but he was waiting for them to ask.

“Stay with us, Lord!” What an incredible prayer to make! That phrase can become a beautiful launching point for our prayer this week, personally and in our families.

A final note: I cannot help but notice, considering our current task of building an archdiocesan culture focused on apostolic mission, that each figure's encounter with Christ in this chapter almost immediately leads to proclamation, an urgency arises in them to tell others. Cleopas and his wife run the seven miles back to Jerusalem *that same night*. It occurs to me that mission is nothing more than this; telling others about what we have experienced and come to see, and that a genuine encounter will lead to a sense of the urgency of this mission.

May God bless you abundantly during this first week of Easter.