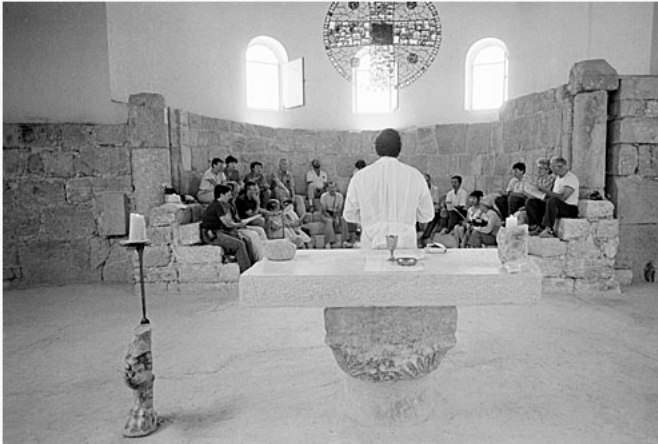


Week 31

Jesus Is with Us

Guide: Recognizing Who He Is



The mystery of our everyday lives is that Jesus is with us, but we often don't recognize him. This week we will reflect on his presence with us, as we continue to ask for the grace of *joy with Jesus risen*.

When Jesus appeared to two disciples on the road to Emmaus, after his resurrection, they didn't know he was with them. They were quite caught up in their discouragement. Good Friday had been devastating to the hopes they had. They were so down because their expectations had died on that Friday. And in their self-pity, they had no room in

their imagination for the Good News that God was trying to reveal to them.

This week we want to enter into the scene of the road to Emmaus and recognize this pattern in our lives. We will try to notice, through our background reflections each day, the ways we get absorbed in problems, discouragements, and worries and are unable to see Jesus with us.

We want to focus on two key parts of the story. Jesus makes the breakthrough in two ways. He begins by "opening up the Scriptures to them." This is very much what Jesus has been doing for us during this retreat. We have come to understand the story and to appreciate how he came to enter our lives completely. We now know the patterns we face of not wanting to embrace our lives completely, resisting our own diminishment and death. The temptations of riches, honors, and pride abound. Jesus has been confronting our discouragement by revealing himself to us and inviting us to fall in love with him and his pattern of giving his life away. And we have seen the scandal of the cross as his revelation that his gift of self is for us. How often our hearts have burned within us!

Jesus then comes into their homes with them and ritually gives them a way to recognize him and remember him. When he "took the bread," they must have seen him as the one who was there to nourish them with the daily bread that he promised would sustain them. When he "blessed it," they must have remembered how he gave thanks to God and placed his life in God's hands. When he "broke it," they knew he was the one whose life was broken open to reveal servant love to us. And, finally, when he "gave it to them," they knew who *they* were again—his disciples. Isn't this how we come to recognize him today?

Use the resources here to get started with this week. Our joy with Jesus grows this week as we come to know, through his self-revelation, in the way he gives himself to us in the breaking of bread, that he is alive and with us.

Some Practical Help for Getting Started This Week

We use the same practical way of proceeding in this week as we have throughout the retreat.

The Mystery We Contemplate

Here it is *Jesus alive and present with us*, even when in our discouragements, we fail to recognize him.

The Grace We Ask For

Here again we desire a deepening sense of *joy with Jesus*. For most of us, it is often easier to feel sorrow than joy, particularly the joy of another. All week long we want to find a way to ask God for the gift to enter more deeply in a joy for Jesus, risen and alive forever.

Our Daily Life Contemplation

This week we want to imagine the scene of Jesus walking along the road to Emmaus with those two distraught disciples. Put yourself into that scene as much as possible. To identify with their saying “we had different hopes.” To recall the story of salvation and the meaning of Jesus’ life, which we have contemplated during this retreat. To share the experience of *recognition* in the breaking of bread.

The Daily Means

Each morning, among the first things I do is pause to focus on the grace I desire this week. As I put on my slippers or robe, I will pause for just a moment each morning and recall the *dynamic* I wish to be so conscious of this day: I can go through my day *without* a sense of Jesus’ presence with me and it’s in the *brokenness moments* that recognition can happen.

Throughout the day, in all the *background* times, return to these thoughts. This will help you be more conscious of Jesus’ being with you. It will also help you see and experience the discouragements and really dark moments in your day in a very different way. Some examples might help.

I find myself at a meeting with several difficult people (or on the phone listening to a friend talk about a family conflict, or I’m watching television and seeing the terrible news of war or some violent crime). The moment I feel my spirit start to go down—in the presence of such conflicts or failures at reconciliation or outright evil—I will do a very brief exercise. *I will imagine Jesus: taking, blessing, breaking, and giving bread.* In that moment, I can be open to the grace of seeing that he is present here, in this situation, being broken and given, if only I open my eyes and see.

I find myself discouraged and beginning to be self-absorbed. (Each of us knows, by this point in the retreat, the situations that occasion this movement.) I will do this very brief exercise, acting against that movement. *I will imagine Jesus: taking, blessing, breaking, and giving me bread.* In that moment, I will no longer be alone. I will be opened to experience love and freedom. God’s victory over this encounter with sin and death becomes very real. In this breaking-of-bread moment, in my everyday life, I recognize he is there. I feel the joy and I feel the freedom this joy gives.

Each night I will find a brief moment to bring the day together in gratitude. I will remember those times during the day when I felt his presence. I simply express my gratitude. I can feel the peace of those moments preparing my spirit to sleep more peacefully. Going to bed this way each night can make a tremendous difference in our lives.

Make use of the various resources provided for this week: the “For the Journey,” and sample words for our attempts at expression, and “In These or Similar Words . . .”

As the *breaking-of-bread* moments of our week grow, they can form a fabric of *presence* moments that not only lift our spirits but also offer the gift of *abiding presence* that the Spirit of Jesus desires for us all, for God's greater glory and the service of others.

For the Journey: Companions

We turn to Luke's Gospel for his unique resurrection story. Two of Jesus' followers, who failed to see him in the breaking up of their personal hopes and failed to see him in the breaking up of his companions, will now recognize him "in the breaking of the bread."

As a "companion," or literally "with bread," is how Jesus comes alongside these two dispirited disciples. Their heads are down and they see the earth without any hope for the new life they had sought in the teachings of Jesus. As a companion, he joins their darkness and gently leads them through their reflections on what has recently happened in Jerusalem. Their eyes are dimmer than their spirits, and they find it hard to believe what they saw happen and what they have heard about his resurrection. They didn't see it happen, so for them, it didn't really occur.

We watch and listen to their sharing in the rising of Jesus as their hearts burn within them while they listen to this mysterious companion. He is a collector, a finder, and he has risen to raise both those who seek for him and those who take the road back to Emmaus.

We find comfort and great joy in watching Jesus compassionately go out after those who have their hearts and hopes broken. It is so human to doubt and want to turn toward wherever our Emmaus hiding place may be.

They freely turned to their own tombs burying their frustrated plans and fractured friendships. Our self-chosen tombs can be such comfortable resting places. These men are going back, and in meeting Jesus they will want not to go back, but to return.

We have been praying often these past weeks about our own tombs and hiding places. Their walls of fear, the locked doors of self-negativity and regret, have been abandoned, and yet we know their comforts and the easily found roads back to their ever-opened portals. It is very dark in our tombs and Jesus constantly invites us into the sunshine. The word *consolation* literally means "with the sunshine," and conversely *desolation* means "down out of the sunshine."

The men we watch these days experience the warmth of the sun in their being invited out of their darkness. The eucharistic "bread-withing" remembers them, and they want to rejoin their companions, who themselves have been called out.

We pray this week with the joys of having been found, having been called out into the sunshine. We also pray with the joy in the awareness that he will always be collecting his followers in the breaking up of their hearts and hopes. He has risen so that we might have confidence in his grace more than our fragile selves. Easter is forever.

In These or Similar Words

Dear Jesus,

I read the story of the men on the road to Emmaus. I shake my head and wonder, How could they see you, someone they love and trust so much, and then not even recognize you? I would certainly recognize you . . . wouldn't I?

I feel like we've been through so much together. How could I not see you? Well, except maybe when I'm worried about how successful I am or how I look to others. Or wondering why I have to speak up about injustices to the poor when I am so busy already. I know I fail to be my best self so often, and I know how often you are there in that failure to forgive and support.

And now you are with me breaking bread, giving me not only this powerful way to remember you but to remind you of who I am with you. I am your disciple, walking along the road, often too distracted to see and sometimes walking the wrong direction and then you remind me about what I really need to know. You come disguised as my kids, or a dear friend, or an annoying neighbor. In each one of them, you are there, only sometimes you are harder to see.

But today, now, in this moment, I know you are with me and I rejoice! I know that even when I forget or can't see clearly, you are there in my heart, guiding, supporting, and loving me. And when I get past the confusion, I feel that passion for you in my heart. As I talked to you on the road to Emmaus, my heart wasn't just warm, Jesus. It was burning inside. I feel different with you; I feel on fire with love for you. My life is so different with you in it, with such a close relationship with you, and I don't want to let it go.

So I forgive myself as I know you forgive me over and over for the times when I may not recognize you or the times I get so caught up in my own cares that I hurt or ignore someone else. Help me to recognize you in everyone around me.

Thank you, Lord, for the gift of Jesus in my life. Thank you for the joy I feel, the happiness of having Jesus in my life in this new, deeper, and stronger way. I truly feel the joy of Easter inside me, burning in my heart!

Scripture Readings

Luke 24:13-35