

HE WAS KNOWN TO THEM IN THE BREAKING OF THE BREAD – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Lk 24.13-35

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ¹⁷ And he said to them, "What is this conversation that you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad.

Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive.

Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see." And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He acted as if he were going farther, but they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem. And they found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together,

saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

It appears from the Gospels that the disciples seem to be more delusional of Jesus's resurrection than of His death. In the older gospel, that of Mark, the text terminates with the announcement of Jesus' resurrection to the women, who do not say anything to anyone, the same delusion appears in Luke's Gospel with the episode of the disciples at Emmaus.

Why this delusion for Jesus' resurrection? If Jesus is dead it simply means that they have mistaken the Messiah, because the Messiah can not die. Therefore if Jesus is dead, they have mistaken the person and there is only to wait for the new Messiah. At that time the Messiahs grew like mushrooms, therefore it means that they were mistaken.

But, and this is the delusion, if Jesus is risen, then all that hope of building the kingdom of Israel, to dominate over the other pagan populations, disappears into nothing. Here is the delusion that appears in this passage. These disciples where are they going to? It is important the locality. Emmaus was an important place because it was the town where there was a battle between Judas Maccabeo and the pagans, and it was won by the Jews.

It was a place of hope for the God liberator, with the defeat of the pagans and the liberation of Israel. Well then, Emmaus was all this, the victory over the pagans and the liberation of Israel. Therefore, as Jesus was dead, and He was obviously not the Messiah, these disciples returned to the place that for them is that of revenge and God's vendetta over the pagans.

Of these disciples only one is given a name. He is called Cleopas, that is short for Cleopatros, meaning 'of an illustrious or glorious father'. Here, these disciples are full of ambition, glory and success. This is the messiah that they want, the triumphant Messiah.

They meet Jesus and, naturally do not recognise Him. They look to the past and are unable to discover the Jesus that presents Himself as new and to Him they confide all their delusion. "*But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel*". But Jesus did not come to free Israel, Jesus is the saviour of mankind. Jesus did not come to restore the defunct Kingdom of David, but to begin the Kingdom of God. And still in the Acts of the Apostles we read that, seeing that the disciples had not understood this, once Jesus was risen, for a good forty days He gathers them together and talks to them of only one theme: the Kingdom of God.

Well, on the fortieth day, one of the disciples asks Him, "*Is this the time when you will reconstruct the Kingdom of Israel?*" Jesus speaks of the Kingdom of God, but they do not understand, they are blind and deaf, because their idea and their hope is the restoration of Israel. Then Jesus "*...beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted...*"

Therefore Jesus more than explaining, interprets the scriptures. Why this? Because the scriptures can be learnt with love. Who puts the good of mankind in first place, as an absolute value, can understand the scriptures. This is the key to the interpretation of the old and new.

So then, when they are near the village – the village in the Gospels is always a symbol of tradition, of incomprehension of Jesus' message – the disciples are directed to the village, they are directed to the tradition, they cannot comprehend the new, while Jesus, as writes the evangelist, "*He acted as if he were going farther*". Jesus goes towards the new and they in fact towards the old.

However they ask Jesus to stay with them. And, "*When he was at table with them, he took the bread*", as He had at the last supper, He repeats the same gesture, "*.. and blessed and broke it and gave it to them.*" Then the evangelist writes, "*And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.*" Jesus is recognized when the bread is taken and broken. Jesus, the son of God, breaks His life for mankind, when they accept Him and are able to make themselves bread to feed the life of others, they become sons of the same God.

It is this experience that makes Jesus' presence perceptible. "*And he...*" Did not disappear as was written in the tradition, but literally "*...vanished from their sight.*" Jesus does not disappear, but He is seen only in the breaking of the bread, the bread that is shared in the community that makes itself bread for others. In fact, when they return to Jerusalem to the other disciples, that's what the two from Emmaus describe "*.....they told what had happened on the road..*"

"*.. on the road..*" was the place of the sowing the seed, that Jesus had already explained..."*Satan comes*", that is the image of the power that destroys the message. Here is why they had not understood the announcement, the words of Jesus, because they are immersed in this ideology of power that makes the lord's words difficult to accept. And how had they known Him? In the breaking of the bread. This criterion was valued then and is valid also today.

Jesus is recognized in His body and His body is the community that comes together to feed the others.