



CYCLE A

Acts 2:14, 22-33

1 Peter 1:17-21

Luke 24:13-35

GATHERING

(An unlit white candle, a crucifix resting on a mirror and a picture of a highway sign signaling a turnaround is placed on a table covered with white cloth.)

This week we encounter Jesus and two disciples on the road. Our readings this week remind us that we sometimes make choices to journey away from Jesus, but then also return. When life expectations are not met we often flee in fear and confusion, but Jesus comes to us on the road. Last week we witnessed the Forgiving Jesus in an encounter with the Doubting Thomas. How did you respond in faith in some situation of uncertainty this past week? *(Members share briefly.)*

OPENING PRAYER

(The candle is lit and the leader invites members to some time of quiet attention to the presence of the risen Lord. After some minutes, the community prays as follows.)

All: Lord, you will show us the path of life.

Leader: Keep me, O God, for in you I take refuge;
I say to the LORD, "My Lord are you."
O LORD, my allotted portion and my cup,
you it is who hold fast my lot.

All: Lord, you will show us the path of life.

Leader: I bless the LORD who counsels me;
even in the night my heart exhorts me.
I set the LORD ever before me;
with him at my right hand I shall not be disturbed.

All: Lord, you will show us the path of life.

Leader: Therefore my heart is glad and my soul rejoices,
my body, too, abides in confidence;
Because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld,
nor will you suffer your faithful one to undergo corruption.

All: Lord, you will show us the path of life.

Leader: You will show me the path to life,
abounding joy in your presence,
the delights at your right hand forever.

All: Lord, you will show us the path of life.

P alm 16:1-2, 5, 7-8, 9-10, 11

Focus Question

Tell of a time when you walked away from a confusing or disappointing situation.

SCRIPTURE SHARING AND REFLECTION

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the gospel reading, the facilitator invites members to mention a word, a phrase or an image from one of the readings that particularly struck them this week. Members then read over the commentary

and consider the questions in silence for several minutes before entering into conversation.)

Commentary

In today's gospel Emmaus appears to be the destination of the disciples. In ancient times, there were as many as six sites called Emmaus. It seems, however, that *leaving* Jerusalem is more important to the understanding of this story than where they were actually *going*. Sometimes we leave somewhere because we feel we must, without really knowing where we are headed.

The two disciples in today's gospel had just experienced the most profound disappointment. Jesus had been crucified. This was he whom they had expected would be the king of Israel. He was to be the king of kings, the almighty, the one to begin the reign of God on earth.

Why did they leave? Expectations had been so high, then the bottom fell out. They were disappointed, discouraged. When life lets us down, we too sometimes leave. How often have you heard it said, perhaps you have said it yourself: I expected more from my parents, my marriage, my job, my church, God!

Crucifixion did not compute. Even told by Jesus that he would suffer and that they would suffer for being with him, they could not absorb it. It was all over, they thought. They leave. Crucifixion does not compute well for us either. In the midst of suffering, we too lose heart; we doubt. We lose trust, so we distance ourselves from people, situations, even God. Caught in that downward spiral, we cannot experience resurrection life. We don't feel loving or loved. We cannot recognize the presence of our loving God.

Jesus stands by in those moments, those times when the bottom has dropped out in our own lives. He moves toward us just as he did on the road to Emmaus. When we are slow to believe, when our eyes are downcast, when our hearts are rigid, even when we retreat from relationship with God, Jesus approaches on that long and winding road. When we stay in touch with Eucharist in the midst of disillusionment, God has that special opportunity to speak the saving word when we hear the scriptures proclaimed. And he who has suffered and was broken like bread is able to heal our brokenness in his sharing with us in the bread of life. Jesus does not abandon us in our disillusionment and

disappointment. He is always there on the road helping us to recognize his presence in our hearts, in our relationships, in our family, work and the events of the world around us. *Stay with us, Lord!*

Their experience on the road to Emmaus resulted in a change of direction for the two disciples. Their encounter with Jesus, the new understanding of his life and mission, their sharing in the bread sent them back to Jerusalem to share with the others their new understanding. Our experience of the resurrected Jesus, our own risen life, is meant to be shared with others. It is meant to move us to action. Good news can't be contained. Feel the joy the two disciples experienced upon returning to their community and the new energy they discovered for their mission to help others encounter Jesus on the road. That mission is ours now. *Stay with us, Lord!*

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ What was it like for you when the bottom fell out?
- ◆ When have you discovered God's presence in the midst of disappointment?
- ◆ If you were a member of the Jerusalem community, how might you have received the two returning disciples – judgmentally or warmly?
- ◆ Who have you helped find God on their long and winding road?
- ◆ Who do you know who has left the church? What can you do to help them find a way back?
- ◆ Reflect on a time when you were confused and discouraged by happening in the parish/church? How did you respond? How did you come to recognize the presence of Jesus in the midst of this confusion and discouragement?

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Recent immigrants have often traveled a difficult road. Read **Tortilla Curtain** by T. Coraghessen Boyle for new insight into the experience

of immigration. Contact your diocesan office to see how you can connect personally to newcomers to your area.

- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for reflection and prayer. Be in touch with where you are on the road in your life's journey these days. Be attentive to how Jesus approaches you at this time on your road.
- ◆ Participate in a walk to help others, such as the Walk for Juvenile Diabetes (walk.jdrf.org), the walk in support of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.NAMI.org) or a walk with the American Heart Association (www.heart.org). Invite others, perhaps your whole small community, to join you.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites members to silent reflection. After some minutes, the community sings "Alleluia, Give the Glory." The song may be found on the Internet. When the song is complete, the community prays the invocations that follow. Members offer additional prayers as they will. To each prayer, members respond, "Stay with us, Lord.")

Leader: When we are fearful because of things that have happened...
 When we cannot recognize you in the people and events of
 our lives...
 We need your redeeming word...
 We hunger for you in the breaking of the bread...
 Our hearts burn for a vibrant sense of your presence in our
 lives and our world...

(When the prayers are complete, the leader passes the crucifix resting on the mirror while inviting members to acknowledge their oneness with Christ as they notice their own reflection while gazing on the crucifix. When the crucifix has been passed, the community prays as follows.)

All: Make your word plain to us, Lord Jesus. May our hearts burn
 with love as we hear your voice in our lives. Amen.

(The session concludes with the exchange of a sign of peace.)