
1. La Salette and Emmaus

September 2020

An Educational and Spiritual Journey toward Proximity, Closeness, and Empathy

The Evangelist Luke writes around the year 85 C.E. for a Greek community in Asia Minor. The community, at that time, was struggling with difficult circumstances, due to internal and external reasons. Internally, there were deep tensions and divisions: former Pharisees who wanted to follow the Law of Moses (cf. Acts 15:1); others who wanted to follow John the Baptist (cf. Acts 19:1-6), and still others who considered themselves to be disciples of Peter, Paul, Apollo, and Christ (cf. 1Cor 1:12). Externally, the persecution of the Roman Empire was increasing, and its ideology continued to exert an increasingly strong and penetrating influence.

In this context, Luke writes with a twofold purpose. On the one hand, he wants to guide and strengthen the faith of his recipients; on the other hand, he writes to encourage them to be in this world as disciples and ambassadors of Christ's work of reconciliation (cf. 2Cor 5:20). In a similar way, The Beautiful Lady of La Salette, through the words addressed to Maximin and Melanie, aims to guide, encourage and form missionaries and ambassadors of her Son.

The Emmaus narrative is a story meant to inspire, guide and strengthen our faith; it is an account that functions as a metaphor for our faith and life journey. For this reason, Emmaus speaks **to** and **of** each of us.

The narrative of the disciples on their way to Emmaus enlightens La Salette, since the Risen Son hints to His mother. Indeed, like Mary at La Salette, the Risen Jesus appears to the two disciples as interpreter, educator and teacher. By turning to the sacred Scriptures, Jesus helps the disciples to interpret and understand the true meaning of the latest events that occurred in Jerusalem. Similarly, Our Lady of La Salette's message invites us to read and interpret our human affairs as a receptacle for the divine.

Both the Risen Jesus on the way to Emmaus and His mother at La Salette promote a "culture of encounter", because they are able to reach their addressees where they are. At La Salette Mary's opening words overcome the fear of the two children. Moreover, Our Lady does not hesitate to shift from French to the local dialect when she realizes that the two children are not able to understand her words: a small detail that reveals her gentle empathy. Like the Mother, the Risen Son encounters the two disciples of Emmaus where they are: in their disappointment, discouragement, and resignation (cf. Lk 24:17), and He lets them experience a transforming encounter.

Like Mary at La Salette, Jesus modulates the rhythm of His journey to that of the two disciples. The Risen One is patient, like The Beautiful Lady of La Salette with Maximin and Melanie. Not by coincidence, Luke points out that "[...] beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (cf. Lk 24:27). In other words, the

Risen One accompanies the two disciples in order to let them internalize a story that involves them directly, a story that will transform their hearts.

On the way to Emmaus, Jesus walks along with the two disciples, giving them the time and the opportunity to recognize Him. The geographical journey (Jerusalem-Emmaus) hints to a spiritual and life changing one. Indeed, Luke starts his narrative by stating that “Now, that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but **they were kept from recognizing him**” (cf. Lk 24:13-16). Then, just before the ending of the story, Luke makes us aware of the transforming moment experienced by the two disciples by writing: “When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and **they recognized him**, and he disappeared from their sight” (cf. Lk 24:30-31). Interesting enough, Luke points out that once the two disciples learn how to recognize the Risen Jesus, He disappears from their sight, and they start to be apostles, or missionaries: “They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There, they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together and saying, “It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon”. Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread” (cf. Luke 24:33-35).

The journey Jerusalem-Emmaus-Jerusalem is a journey toward both freedom and healing. The presence of the Risen Jesus heals because it sets us free. We just need to know how to recognize His presence, His “footprints” within our faith and life journey.

Luke 24:13-35 is an inspiring narrative for all of us called to be missionary-disciples of the Risen One: by looking at the pedagogy enacted by Jesus on the way to Emmaus, we can learn a lot about the “New Evangelization”. The same can be said in relation to Our Lady of La Salette: her words and actions, like those of her Son, inspire, guide and help us to live this earthly pilgrimage as new evangelizers and as ambassadors of the reconciliation offered to us by Jesus the Christ.

A Pedagogy of the Word: From Tears to Joy...

**“Were not our hearts burning within us
while he talked with us on the road
and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Lk 24:32)**

The focus of this reflection is the journey of the two disciples of Emmaus (cf. Lk 24:13-33) as well as the apparition of Our Lady to Maximin and Melanie on the mountain of La Salette. An unexpected message of joy comes from the French Alps, despite its warning and challenging truths. As the two disciples of Emmaus, the two children experience a profound joy after the encounter with The Beautiful Lady of La Salette. Indeed, in one of the children’s reports they state: **“After (she passed away) we were very happy and we went back to took care of our cows”**. The joy of the two disciples of Emmaus is the result of their attentive listening to the words spoken by the Risen Jesus. This joy deeply transforms their lives. By the end of the story Luke portrays the two disciples as apostles proclaiming Jesus’ Resurrection.

Their joy echoes that of Mary when, at the moment of the Annunciation in Nazareth, she says, “Yes” to Gabriel’s words. The evangelist Luke clearly highlights this joy in the Magnificat, a text that reveals what it means to submit our heart to the Word of God. In continuity with the Annunciation story and with the Emmaus narrative, Our Lady of La Salette stresses the importance of an attentive listening: **“If my people do not want to *submit* ... if they convert”**.

Both the Emmaus story and the Apparition of Our Lady of La Salette remind us that, if we desire to be fruitful followers of Jesus Christ, we need to listen with attention and openness of heart to His words and to apply them to our lives. It is not an easy task, but we are helped by Mary’s presence who reminds us *to do whatever he tells us* (see John 2:5).

Both Emmaus and La Salette exemplify a spirituality that is deeply centered around the Word of God. Moreover, both Emmaus and La Salette teach us how to walk along with our brothers and sisters like the Risen Jesus and Our Lady of La Salette; both of them remind us of the importance of being able to reread or interpret our own faith and life journey in the light of the Word of God in order to be, more and more, Christ-centered missionary-disciples.

A Pedagogy Leading to Heaven...

Mary’s Apparition at La Salette happened in three phases: the first, in a sitting position with her face hidden in her hands; the second, standing and talking to the children; and, the third, moving toward the top of the hill while communicating her last words to Maximin and Melanie.

It is interesting to notice that, before disappearing, Our Lady of La Salette does not advise the two children how to behave after this transforming encounter; Mary doesn’t even tell them to go back to the small village of La Salette, or to go to the pastor of the Parish or to the Bishop of the Diocese of Grenoble to report their encounter with her. No; Mary has only one request, and she repeats it twice: “Let all my people know.” Mary’s last words bear a twofold meaning. On the one hand, they call us to be her ambassadors by sharing her message among our brothers and sisters, and, on the other hand, they invite us to follow her example, i.e. to see and to travel the ‘uphill’ path as she did, being aware that our identity and dignity in Christ make us heirs and inhabitants of Heaven. At La Salette, Mary reminds us that this is the ultimate goal of our earthly pilgrimage. True, the road ‘to Heaven’ may be ‘uphill’ and ‘winding’ because of sin, but we are not left alone: there is the Son who reveals to us the ‘road to Heaven’ through His life, words, and, especially, through His Death and Resurrection.

Let us follow, therefore, with confidence and trust, the one who, at La Salette, walked the ‘uphill’ and ‘winding’ path bearing the cross of the Son on her chest, and we will receive the graces we need to go through such a journey. Let us keep in our hearts and minds the words we proclaim during every Eucharist celebrated here on earth, “[...] **awaiting Your [second] coming**” **so that, at His *Parousia*, we will be justified by and in Him for Life Eternal**. Yes, because Jesus’ followers never stop on the road of their earthly pilgrimage; they always follow the ‘uphill’ and ‘winding’ path leading to Heaven.