

Through Emmaus Eyes

An Easter Reflection

They recognised him in the breaking of the bread.

I am fascinated by this pivotal moment of recognition, mentioned twice in the Emmaus story (Lk 24:30-31, 35). It is easy to be perplexed as to why the disciples *didn't* recognise what is so obvious to me as reader. Yet, I also hear the text gently chiding the reader's own lack of recognition.

For example, I sometimes ponder how I was able to read this story for so many years before clearly 'seeing' Jesus' *Jewishness*, when Judaism permeates every element of the narrative. The Scriptures that fire hearts are Israel's Torah; the breaking of bread presumes Jewish table rituals; the disciples hasten to rejoin their (Jewish) companions and their witness leads to Jerusalem, the cultic centre of Jewish identity. The Gospel's 'recognition' of the risen Jesus is inconceivable without Jesus' Jewish ancestry, Scriptures, traditions, his entire Jewish story as a descendent of Abraham. Why were my Christian eyes and ears so slow to 'see' and 'hear' the vitality of Jewish life, both in this ancient text and alive today?

Easter is the highpoint of Christian faith and proclamation. It celebrates a climactic point in the story of salvation: the Crucified One in fact lives! Light is stronger than darkness, love is more powerful than death. God's Spirit-filled gift in the risen Jesus offers forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, eternal life.

Belief in Jesus as universal Saviour and Son of God is, of course, a doctrinal fork in the road for the practical realities of interfaith relations. In this sense, Easter is a clear divide between Jews and Christians. And yet, paradoxically, for Christians it also intensifies the need to draw close to Judaism. How so? Because Jesus of Nazareth was Jewish, and the whole Paschal Mystery takes place in and through his life as a faithful Jew immersed in the kinship bonds and religious traditions of his

Jewish ancestry. "Whoever meets Jesus, meets Judaism" (St John Paul II, Rome, 1980).

Without Judaism there would be no 'light to the nations', no great Story of covenantal relationship with God into which we Gentiles are drawn. It is upon the sure foundations of the Hebrew Scriptures that our New Testament proclamation stands. It is because of countless beautiful Jewish traditions, faithfully kept over generations, that Jesus' followers had a ritual basis from which to express their Easter faith. It is because of the sheer historical fact of Jewish existence that Christians even *have* Jesus, the son of a Jewish mother. Further, in keeping with Christian belief in bodily resurrection, we can intuit that Jesus' earthly (Jewish) story somehow remains integral to his personal identity in resurrection and glory.

As we travel the road to Emmaus this Easter:

May our hearts 'burn' and our eyes be 'opened' with *recognition* of the risen Jesus in the fullness of his personal story, including his identity as a 'brother' to his Jewish kin.

May the healing power of Easter Sunday continue to transform Churches in their new life of reconciliation with the Jewish people.

May we 'see' and rejoice in the vitality of Jewish covenantal life which has endured throughout the centuries to this very day—a reality acknowledged in present-day Catholic teaching and that of other mainstream Churches. too

May our Easter joy deepen our encounter with Jesus, the living Word, and with the Jewish people with whom we Christians share a sacred Scripture. "For God continues . . . to bring forth treasures of wisdom which flow from their encounter with his word" (EG, 249). Amen.

© Teresa Pirola, 2021. lightoftorah.net. Reproduction for non-commercial use permitted with acknowledgment of website. A shorter version of this article appeared in the Catholic Leaders Formation Network, www.cfn.org