

## Encountering Jesus

My dear Sisters,

I am sure that during this Lenten season each of you would have undertaken various spiritual practices both individually and as a community in order to live the meaning of this Season of Grace. I don't know if your spiritual exercises or practises also included an aspect of waiting with Hope to 'encounter the Risen Lord'.

Actually, the fourth Sunday of Advent is also known as 'Laetare Sunday' (last Sunday), much like the 'Gaudete Sunday', in Advent season, carrying the theme of 'Waiting in Joyful Hope'. This Hope is actually the Hope of meeting or 'Encountering the Risen Lord at Easter and of Encountering Baby Jesus at Christmas'. In short, in the midst of both Advent and Lent, the Church invites us to spend time waiting in Joyful Hope for the all- important Encounter with the Lord.

I have often used the word 'Encounter' in my circulars, in my talks or on other occasions. I am deeply convinced that for one's life to be transformed, one must encounter Jesus authentically. Here, during this time we speak about Encountering the Risen Jesus. I would like for our reflection to focus on these two stories: namely Mary's encounter with the Risen One and that of the disciples on the way to Emmaus.

The story of Mary is a significant faith experience. After the crucifixion of Jesus, Mary Magdalene is sad and desolate. Her heart is weeping. The Gospel describes her as a woman looking and searching for Jesus (John 20:11-18).



Why Weeped Thou? by Simon Dewey. © Simon Dewey, courtesy Adas Fine Art

In the book titled, “Jesus”, by Jose A Pagola, he notes that Mary cannot resign herself to living without Him. Her life would have no meaning. She keeps repeating to people the reason why she is crying. “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him”. Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved reply with silence: they don’t know where he is either. The two angels beside the tomb now invite her to search Jesus within herself. They ask her a pointed question, “Woman why are you weeping?” Mary then desperately approaches the person she thinks is the gardener. He asks her, “Woman why are you weeping? Who are you looking for”?

Pagola suggests this questioning is actually a deeper invitation that an inner search has to be undertaken. Perhaps the key question extended towards you and me is, “Who/what am I looking for in my life”? (Let us spend some quality time dwelling on this question).

Jesus helps Mary (as also us) in her/our search for Him in addressing her by her name, ‘Mary’. She at once turned to him and said in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!”. She bursts into boundless joy at hearing her name directly from her Lord. That was the result of her intense longing and search for her Master for which she is duly rewarded.

Is there anything comparable with Mary in my search and longing to meet Jesus? Is my search and longing for Him as intense? Does Jesus turn around and ask me, “What are you looking for”? Do I hear him address me by my personal name? And do I turn around immediately to him in an outburst of joy, calling him, “Rabbouni” or whatever else I would like to address Him as? Or do I not even hear His voice calling me? Or maybe I do hear His voice but am too busy to ‘turn around’ to him with boundless joy to encounter Him in His risen beauty, because I do not have enough time for Him? Or if I do have time for him, the next question could be, “How is my encounter with Him”?

The Emmaus Encounter: Their (disciples’) spirits are engulfed by sadness, desolation and despair. Is anything even left of their faith, one wonders? They have been with Jesus. They know His life, they know the stories but at this time none of this helps. That is when Jesus begins to explain to them the meaning of the event that has taken place in the light of the scriptures (Lk 24:13-35.) Pagola again says, “wherever a group of people are walking through life, trying to understand the meaning of the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth, wherever his passion is remembered and the real presence of one who walks with us on the road, it is a presence not easily grasped because our eyes may not recognise him, a presence that invites us to see that we are slow of heart to believe”. But it is his presence that awakens their hope. Later they confess that while Jesus was talking to them on the road their hearts were burning within them.



The Emmaus encounter is one of the most fascinating stories in the gospels and can be easily compared with or applied to our own situation vis-à-vis our encounter with Jesus. These two, like us, who have spent so many years in religious life, could claim that they/we have spent so much time with Jesus. And yet when the risen Lord was walking with them, they did not recognize him. Well, the reason could well have been that they were so overwhelmed with the incidents of Jesus' arrests, his carrying the Cross and being eventually crucified that they could not think or do anything else.

Would I be right to presume that often we miss recognizing Jesus walking with us because we are too preoccupied with our problems – be that of running the school or our institute, or as superior having a tough time with a particular sister or vice-versa, or due to my own sickness or that of a near one in the family or umpteen other things including being distracted with some friendships? If we do not even recognize His presence because of any of the many problems we face, how can we think of really encountering Him?

In an article, “Encountering Jesus”, Msgr. Peter J Vagi proposes three things: First, Jesus is alive in his word, the inspired Gospel stories, and the living tradition of our Church. Second, we meet Jesus in the sacraments, especially in regular participation in both the Eucharist and the sacrament of reconciliation. And third, we meet Jesus in our loving service to those in need, those who live on the periphery of society.

**In His Word:** In his first encyclical, “The Light of Faith,” Pope Francis writes, “The word which God speaks to us in Jesus is not simply one word among many, but His Eternal Word.” But how do we come to meet and know and be affected by Jesus in our meditative and prayerful appropriation of his holy word?

**In Sacraments:** We also encounter Jesus in the sacraments of the Church, the sacraments of faith. In “The Light of Faith,” Pope Francis describes the sacraments as a “special means” for passing down the fullness of “our encounter

with the true God, a light which touches us at the core of our being and engages our minds, wills and emotions, opening us to relationships lived in communion.”

**In Works of Charity:** Finally, we encounter Jesus in our works of charity. In “The Light of Faith,” Francis writes, “The hands of faith are raised up to heaven, even as they go about building in charity a city based on relationships in which the love of God is laid as a foundation.” In our works of charity, founded on the love of God, we encounter God. Francis also says that in Christ, “our lives become radically open to a love that precedes us, a love that transforms us from within, acting in us and through us.” As we imitate the love of Christ, we encounter him within us and in the persons we help.

My dear sisters, let us, as we prepare to relive the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, pray for the gift of a deeper encounter with the Lord in His Word, in the sacraments, particularly in the sacrament of Confession and the Eucharist and in our service, especially to the poor and the needy.

Wishing all of you the Joy and Hope of Easter!!

*m. nirmalini*

**Superior General**