

LEADER



A CURE FOR DISCOURAGEMENT

A Retreat Guide for Easter

Written and presented by
Fr. John Bartunek, LC, S.Th.D.

Produced by Coronation
CoronationMedia.com



RCSpirituality.org

FIRST MEDITATION

TWO DISCOURAGED DISCIPLES

INTRODUCTION

It was Easter Sunday. The gruesome events of Good Friday were over, and while the eleven Apostles were still hanging together, the wider circle of disciples was starting to disperse.

Two of these, one named Cleopas, were walking from Jerusalem back to their town of Emmaus. Along the way, they were discussing everything that had happened—the life and teaching of Jesus, his trial and crucifixion, and even the first vague reports of the empty tomb. But it was not a happy, enthusiastic discussion. On the contrary, St. Luke tells us that they were “looking downcast.” They were disheartened—the Greek word has connotations of gloomy and morose. They were experiencing what all of us experience sooner or later in our faith journey: the suffocating weight of discouragement.

THE ROLE OF SADNESS

Simple sadness is different than discouragement. Feeling sad is part of being human, and nothing is wrong with that emotion. But when we let the feeling of sadness seep into our hearts and minds and extinguish our hope, then it becomes a danger, a temptation, a threat to the health of our souls—that’s discouragement.

An old saying among spiritual writers claims that discouragement never comes from the Holy Spirit. The emotion of sadness, however, can be in harmony with the Holy Spirit’s work in our souls, because this fallen world has legitimate causes for sadness—death, loss, sin and the destruction wreaked by sin, for example. To be insensitive to those things would be inhuman and spiritually blind.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus proclaimed that experiencing sadness over these kinds of things, a sadness in harmony with truth, helps us move forward on the path of a meaningful life: “Blessed are those who mourn,” he taught, “for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

Jesus himself sometimes experienced profound sadness: he wept over the city of Jerusalem, which refused to receive his message of salvation; he wept over the death of his friend Lazarus; and his soul became “sorrowful even to death” in the Garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:34).

DEFINING DISCOURAGEMENT

But that kind of sadness is different than discouragement. Since sadness comes simply from recognizing the brokenness of a fallen world, it doesn’t paralyze us and extinguish our hope. Rather, it expresses our love for all that is good and true, for all that sin and evil destroy. This kind of sadness, then, strengthens our hearts against evil and actually feeds our courage.

Discouragement, on the other hand, is sadness gone wild. Like a wound that has become infected, discouragement is sadness that starts to fester, and it produces spiritual poison. The English word “discouragement” expresses this well. Literally, it means “without courage.” To become discouraged is to lose the energy necessary to continue fighting. To become discouraged is to play with the temptation to give up and give in, to stop trying.

Someone who is discouraged no longer strives after the worthy goal that they used to believe in, because they no longer have any hope that that goal is attainable. And that is precisely why discouragement can never come from the Holy Spirit: because in Christ, with the help of God’s grace, every worthy goal is always attainable. As the angel said to the Blessed Virgin Mary during the Annunciation: “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Luke 1:37). And Jesus himself said the same thing: “For human beings this is impossible, but for God all things are possible” (Matthew 19:26). That’s why discouragement always hides some kind of lie.



THE EXPECTATION TRAP

These two disciples, then, are dragging their feet towards Emmaus, with long faces and downcast hearts. They are in a dangerous situation, spiritually speaking: they are discouraged.

At that point, Jesus comes up and starts walking beside them, though they don't recognize him. Jesus asks them what they are talking about, and in their explanation of the recent events, they reveal why they are discouraged. After explaining about all the wonderful things that Jesus had done, and the horrible tragedy of his betrayal, crucifixion, and death, they say,

“But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel ...”

—Luke 24:21

“We were hoping,” the two disciples admit. They had hoped in Jesus, but now their hope had died. They had expected so much from him, even to the point of changing the direction of their lives in order to follow him, but now their expectations had been shattered, and they were returning to the way things had been before.

We have all had that experience. We have all expected God to act in a certain way in our lives, and then had the wind knocked out of us when those expectations were not met. We have all felt the disappointment, the confusion, the frustration—the discouragement that can come with shattered expectations.

THE REAL CAUSE OF DISCOURAGEMENT

Up to that point in the conversation, Jesus had simply been listening. But once they finish their story, he chimes in with some words that don't appear to be very comforting, at least not at first. He says to them, “O how foolish you are!” He calls them fools! I suppose he said it with a smile and not a frown, but even so, we can only imagine the shocked look on the faces of these two disciples when this apparent stranger, instead of commiserating with them, upbraids them.

And then Jesus goes on to explain why they are being foolish, and in so doing, he reveals the real cause of every discouragement, of every festering sadness that threatens to extinguish our hope and paralyze our souls. Here are the words of our Lord:

“O, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”

—Luke 24:25

There it is, the source of all spiritual discouragement: a faltering faith, an unwillingness to believe in God's way of doing things, a reluctance to accept the revealed truth that all salvation, all growth in holiness, all progress in spiritual maturity must pass along the way of the cross. When things go wrong, it doesn't mean God has abandoned us—the Crucifixion isn't the end of the story; the Resurrection is.

When we expect life to be without the cross, our expectations are false, and they will always end up being shattered. It was necessary, Jesus emphasizes, it was somehow part of God's plan that the new and eternal life shining out on Easter Sunday should rise from the hideous and painful darkness of Good Friday.

CONCLUSION: KINDLING HOPE FROM THE CRUCIFIX

Someone who has never heard that story, who has never had the gospel explained to them, could understandably fall into discouragement in the face of this world's brokenness and sin. And this is why we must always look for opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus with those who don't know it.

But for those of us who have heard the gospel, who wear crucifixes around our necks and hang them on our walls—the healthy sadness that comes into our lives now and then can only degenerate into the soul-sickening disease of discouragement if we fail to exercise our faith in that crucifix and all that it tells us about God's infinite love, mercy, and power.

In the next meditation, we will look at how Jesus bolstered the faith of these disciples so as to rescue them from discouragement, but for now, let's prayerfully reflect on this amazing truth that Jesus has wanted to reveal to us. The following questions and quotations may help your meditation.



QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/ GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Does the distinction between healthy, normal sadness and spiritually dangerous discouragement make sense to me? How would I explain it to someone else?
2. When have I experienced normal, healthy sadness, and how did it affect me? When have I experienced dangerous discouragement, and how did it affect me?
3. What situations, circumstances, or other factors tend to make me feel discouraged? Analyze them in light of the gospel truths presented in this meditation and try to identify the lie that those factors speak to my heart in order to discourage me.

And he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?”

—Luke 24:13–26
NABRE

“For though the fig tree does not blossom, and no fruit appears on the vine, Though the yield of the olive fails and the terraces produce no nourishment, Though the flocks disappear from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls, Yet I will rejoice in the LORD and exult in my saving God. GOD, my Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet swift as those of deer and enables me to tread upon the heights.

—Habakkuk 3:17–19
NABRE

THREE QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR MEDITATION

“Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, looking downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?” And he replied to them, “What sort of things?” They said to him, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place. Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see.”

...

“I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us ... For in hope we were saved. Now hope that sees for itself is not hope. For who hopes for what one sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance ... We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him? ... For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

—Romans 8:18, 24–25, 28–32, 38–39
NABRE



SECOND MEDITATION

THREE ANTIDOTES TO DISCOURAGEMENT


INTRODUCTION

It's good to know the danger that discouragement presents to our spiritual growth. It's good to know the difference between crippling discouragement and normal, healthy sadness. And it's good to know that, in the end, spiritual discouragement is always caused by a lie, the lie that God really can't handle it when things go wrong. All of this is revealed to us in the post-Resurrection appearance of our Lord to those two discouraged disciples heading to Emmaus on the first Easter Sunday.

IN SEARCH OF THE CURE

But knowing all of that will only deepen our frustration unless we also know how to resist discouragement when it tempts us. What is, after all, the cure for discouragement? Jesus reveals this too on the road to Emmaus.

After our Lord tells these two travelers how foolish they are for being so slow to believe all that the prophets had spoken about the Messiah, St. Luke explains what Jesus did next:

 *Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.*

—Luke 24:27

In other words, Jesus instructed them, reminded them, about the truths of their faith. That's the primary cure for discouragement. Since discouragement is based on a lie, a lie often craftily hidden inside difficult circumstances and harsh realities, its antidote will always include a good, fresh dose of the truth.

In his encounter with these two disciples, Jesus shows us three ways to administer that antidote, three places, so to speak, where we can go to bolster our faith and cure our discouragement. Let's take a look at them one by one.

BIBLE EYES

The first place to restore our vision of the truth is the word of God itself: the Bible, and the interpretation given to the Bible by the Church.


It's interesting to note the exact phrase St. Luke uses in this regard. He tells us that Jesus, "beginning with Moses and all the prophets, interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures." Moses was traditionally held to be the author of the first five books of the Bible, whereas "the prophets" refers to the rest of the Old Testament. And here we see Jesus explaining that all of those scriptures, compiled over the course of a couple thousand years, with dozens of different human authors, were all written about him. He is the Savior, and so the whole story of salvation ultimately gets its meaning from him. And to understand him completely we need to study the whole story of salvation. This is why St. Jerome could write that "ignorance of scripture is ignorance of Christ."

As Jesus walked and talked about the scriptures with these two disciples their discouragement melted away. St. Luke tells us that their "hearts were burning within them while he spoke ... and opened the scriptures to them" (Cf. Luke 24:32). If we want to keep our minds strengthened with the truth and armed against attacks of discouragement, there is no better place to start than in regular, prayerful, heartfelt study of and meditation on the sacred scriptures and all the teachings of the Church that faithfully explain them.

EUCCHARISTIC FOOD FOR A TROUBLED JOURNEY


The second place to find a cure for discouragement is the Eucharist, and this too appears in the Gospel account. At the end of their journey, the two disciples invited Jesus to stay with them, since night was coming on. Let's read what happened next, according to St. Luke:



 As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight.


—Luke 24:28–31

Did you notice the four verbs that Luke uses to describe what Jesus did at table with the disciples? He took bread, said the blessing, broke the bread, and gave it to them. Earlier in his Gospel, Luke used the exact same verbs to describe the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper. He wrote:

 Then he [Jesus] took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them.

—Luke 22:19

St. John Paul II referred to this passage in his very last encyclical letter, which was dedicated to renewing the Church’s devotion to the Eucharist. In his conclusion, the description he gives of the Eucharist is almost a point-by-point explanation of how this sacrament is an excellent antidote to discouragement. Here are the words of the saint:


 In the humble signs of bread and wine, changed into his body and blood, Christ walks beside us as our strength and our food for the journey, and he enables us to become, for everyone, witnesses of hope. If, in the presence of this mystery, reason experiences its limits, the heart, enlightened by the grace of the Holy Spirit, clearly sees the response that is demanded, and bows low in adoration and unbounded love.

—St. John Paul II
Ecclesia de Eucharistia, 62

Strength, hope, enlightenment, love—these are the very things that discouragement seeks to extinguish. When we come in faith to the Eucharist, the Lord rekindles them.

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

After Jesus revived these disciples’ hearts by explaining the scriptures to them, and after he revealed himself and gave himself to them in the Eucharist, he disappeared. He simply vanished. This is one of those alarming manifestations of the radical newness of Christ’s resurrected life. In the disciples’ response to Christ’s disappearance, we find the third way to administer the antidote for discouragement. St. Luke tells us what they did:

 So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

—Luke 24:33-35

Discouragement had separated these disciples from the larger community of believers. Their encounter with the risen Jesus impels them back into that community, where they receive new strength and support.

As Christians, we are not meant to make our journey of faith all alone, like Lone Rangers. We are meant to walk beside each other, to lean on each other, to strengthen and enlighten each other. God himself is a community of persons—a Trinity. And we are created in his image. We cannot continue to fight the good Christian fight on our own; we cannot persevere to the end without giving and receiving encouragement. Just as no one can baptize themselves, or forgive their own sins, so too none of us can resist the onslaught of discouragement for very long without the loving embrace of fellow believers.

CONCLUSION: EXTENDING THE EASTER VICTORY

Without Christ’s Easter victory over death and sin, discouragement really would have the last word. But through his resurrection, Jesus assures us that everything truly worthwhile in life is within our reach, as long as we keep our hand in his hand. And we can do that by nourishing our minds on his revelation, feeding our hearts with the Eucharist, and bolstering our souls with good Christian fellowship.



In the conference, we will look briefly at how we can become better encouragers, but for now, let's take a few minutes to prayerfully reflect on this divinely inspired cure for discouragement. The following questions and quotations may help your meditation.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/ GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What role does the Bible play in my daily life? How much do I value the Bible? How much effort do I make to feed my mind and my heart with its words and message? How could I improve in this area?
2. What role does the Eucharist play in my daily life? Have I ever experienced God's presence in the Eucharist in a particularly powerful way? Savor that and thank God for it. What can I do to make the Eucharist a more central factor in my life-journey?
3. What role do faith-community and faith-based friendships play in my daily life? How ready am I to support others whose faith needs a boost? How ready am I to lean on others to help support my faith?

THREE QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR MEDITATION

*How I love your law, Lord! I study it all day long.
Your commandment makes me wiser than my foes, as it
is forever with me.
I have more insight than all my teachers, because I
ponder your testimonies.
I have more understanding than my elders, because I
keep your precepts.
I keep my steps from every evil path, that I may observe
your word.
From your judgments I do not turn, for you have
instructed me.
How sweet to my tongue is your promise, sweeter than
honey to my mouth!
Through your precepts I gain understanding; therefore I
hate all false ways.
Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path.*

—Psalm 119:97–105
NABRE

As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?"

—Luke 24:28-32
NABRE

Every commitment to holiness, every activity aimed at carrying out the Church's mission, every work of pastoral planning, must draw the strength it needs from the Eucharistic mystery and in turn be directed to that mystery as its culmination. In the Eucharist we have Jesus, we have his redemptive sacrifice, we have his resurrection, we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, we have adoration, obedience and love of the Father. Were we to disregard the Eucharist, how could we overcome our own deficiency? The mystery of the Eucharist ... must be experienced and lived in its integrity, both in its celebration and in the intimate converse with Jesus which takes place after receiving communion or in a prayerful moment of Eucharistic adoration apart from Mass.

—St. John Paul II
Ecclesia de Eucharistia, 60–61

NOTES



Lined writing area for notes, consisting of two columns of horizontal lines.



CONFERENCE

SPREADING THE CURE FOR DISCOURAGEMENT

INTRODUCTION

What would you do if your neighbors ran out of gas on a long road trip, and you were driving by with a full tank? Probably, you would help them out. You would give them a lift to the gas station, help them fill up a container with some gas, and take them back to their car so they could get going again. Most of us would do that even for a stranger.

Falling under the influence of discouragement in life is a lot like running out of gas on a long trip. Discouragement drains the tank of energy, motivation, purpose, and meaning. When it takes over, people lose hope, get desperate, and start making bad decisions. Their tank is empty, and they get stuck.

SHOW SOME IDENTIFICATION, PLEASE

Jesus has given us the cure for discouragement, as we have seen in the first and second meditations. Our tank is full—or at least it's not completely empty. When we run across people stuck on the side of the road, we should lend them a hand. We need to realize that doing so is an essential part of our identity as Christians, as followers and ambassadors of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world and source of all truth, light, and hope. Here's how the Catechism puts it when describing the grace we receive through the sacrament of confirmation, the sacrament that completes our Christian initiation:

[Confirmation] gives us a special strength of the Holy Spirit to spread and defend the faith by word and action as true witnesses of Christ, to confess the name of Christ boldly, and to never be ashamed of the Cross ... the confirmed person receives the power to express faith in Christ publicly and as it were officially.

—CCC 1303, 1305

In other words, what Jesus did for the two discouraged disciples on the road to Emmaus, every Christian is supposed to do for anyone we meet who has never seen, or who has lost sight of, the life-giving hope that comes from Christ. Jesus explained the deeper

meaning of some confusing and tragic events that had disheartened those disciples. We know that deeper meaning—not perfectly, but well enough. And we are called to share our knowledge with those who don't, to offer others the cures for discouragement that Jesus so generously, and so untiringly, offers to us.

A POIGNANT PARABLE

We all remember the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus was a homeless man, covered with sores, who lay at the gate of a rich man's estate, hoping that the rich man would give him some leftovers from his sumptuous table. He was so wretched that dogs would come and lick his sores. But he waited in vain. The rich man never paid any attention to him, and continued to enjoy his wealth without any thought for the beggar at his door. When they both died, the rich man went to a place of suffering, and poor Lazarus went to a place of comfort. Abraham appears to the rich man in his suffering state, and explains:

“My child, remember that you received what was good during your lifetime while Lazarus likewise received what was bad; but now he is comforted here, whereas you are tormented.

—Luke 16:25

It was no sin for the rich man to be rich, just as it was no sin for the poor man to be poor. But in the end, when justice is done, the rich man suffers because he didn't share with others what he had received in abundance from the Lord.

SPIRITUAL ABUNDANCE

Usually this parable is applied to our duty to share material abundance with those who are in material need. But it should also make us think about the spiritual riches that we have received. We have been given faith in Jesus Christ; we believe in the Resurrection; we know that suffering is not the end of the story, just as Good Friday wasn't the end of Jesus; we know that the Lord promises eternal life



and everlasting happiness to those who accept his forgiveness and become his followers. These truths, and all the many more truths of our Catholic faith, are what strengthen us in times of trouble and bolster us when sadness threatens to fester into discouragement.

What happens to people who don't know these truths, who have never experienced the forgiveness and love of Jesus Christ? Where are they supposed to turn when they are faced with the travesty of their own sinfulness, or the tragic loss of a loved one? Without faith in Christ, what will protect them from the spiritual paralysis and moral degradation that radiate out from the poisonous infection of discouragement?

Like the neighbor with the empty tank of gas, unless someone brings them into the light of Christ, they will stay stuck, and frustrated, and defeated by the evil of this fallen world.

EVERY CHRISTIAN'S MISSION

We can never force someone to accept the supernatural hope offered by the gospel. Human freedom is always in play, and even Jesus didn't convince Judas to trust in him to the end. But just because we can't control whether someone will accept Christ's message, that doesn't mean we shouldn't keep our eyes open for opportunities to share that message, and to do so confidently. In fact, spreading the message of Christ is the primary mission of the Church. It's what Jesus commanded his followers to do in his last conversation with them after his Resurrection and before his Ascension. St. Matthew explains how that conversation went:

“Then Jesus approached and said to them, ‘All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you ...’”

—Matthew 28:18–20

Not every Christian will fulfill this mission in the same way, but every Christian is called to do something. Sometimes we think that spreading the faith is the exclusive job of priests, nuns, and others who have consecrated their lives completely to the Church's work of evangelization. But that is not true. Christians

are consecrated to this work through their baptism and their confirmation. Here is how the Catechism explains it, referring to this work of spreading Christ's message as the “apostolate”:

“Since, like all the faithful, lay Christians are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty, individually or grouped in associations, to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all men throughout the earth ... To teach in order to lead others to faith is the task of every preacher and of each believer ...”

—CCC 900, 904

FRINGE BENEFITS

When we talk about this in terms of duty, it can seem like a heavy imposition, something that we have to do but that will detract from our own happiness. But that point of view is backwards.

When you help that neighbor stuck on the highway, how does it make you feel—less human, less fulfilled, less content? On the contrary, we all know from experience that when we are able to be of some real service to another person who is in real need, we ourselves benefit from it as much as the person we help. As Jesus put it, “... it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). The more we share with others what we have received from Christ, the more fulfilling our lives will be. It is that simple.

THREE WAYS TO SHARE

But how do we do that? If someone's car needs gas, it's obvious how we can help. But if someone's soul is languishing in discouragement, we can't just pour our own faith into them, can we?

Since each of us has a unique experience with God, each of us will have to gradually discover, under God's own guidance and with some trial and error, how best to share that experience with others. And yet, on the road to Emmaus Jesus exemplifies three basic behaviors that all of us should emulate in our efforts to be his messengers.



GREAT LISTENERS

The first thing Jesus did was listen. He met these two travelers right where they were, coming up to them and walking beside them, adjusting his own pace of travel to theirs. And before he shared any of his own wisdom, he asked questions and gave them a chance to explain their own experience and thoughts.

If we want to help others come closer to Christ, one of our primary tasks as Christians, we need to be great listeners. We need to learn how to meet people where they are. Too often we make false assumptions about them and their motivations. Like good doctors, we need to prescribe our medicine after discovering what the patient is truly suffering from, not before.

TALKING THE TALK

The second thing Jesus did was use words. He explained God's plan of salvation to these travelers. He explained the scriptures. He applied the eternal truths of revelation to the specific situation in which those two disciples found themselves.

This is also something we all can learn to do. In order to use words to help unfold the beauty of God's revelation, we ourselves need to understand it, and that requires ongoing prayer and study. But we must never be afraid of speaking clearly about the Gospel. As St. Paul put it:

But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?

—Romans 10:14

CONCLUSION: WALKING THE WALK

Finally, after listening and speaking, Jesus followed up his words with actions. He entered their home and gave of himself to them—he gave them the Eucharist, his own body and blood.

This too is essential to all our efforts at spreading the faith. We must show in our actions that we truly believe in Jesus and his teaching. We must give of ourselves, serving those around us, living virtuously and responsibly, seeking ways to do for others what we would have them do for us, as Jesus taught. Many

times, only self-giving love will be able to heal hearts suffering from festering sadness. Many times, only a concrete act of self-forgetful generosity will be able to unlock a heart shut tight against the light of faith.

However God inspires each of us to share with others what we have received from him, it will always involve listening, speaking, and giving, just as it did for Jesus. Let's take some time now to prayerfully reflect on the personal questionnaire, which is designed to help apply these general principles to our own daily lives.

PERSONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. When have I been in need of help from other people? How did it feel when I received that help? How did it feel when I didn't receive that help? Why?
2. When have I spontaneously come to the help of another person? How did it affect that person? How did it affect me?
3. When has someone tried to offer me help in a way that just made the situation worse? Why did that happen?
4. Who in my life is a great listener? What are the characteristics that make that person such a good listener?
5. How well do I listen? How intentionally have I tried to develop the skill of listening?
6. How well do I know how to accompany others at their own pace and along their own journey, as Jesus did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus?
7. If someone asked me to explain Christianity to them, how would I respond?
8. How would I explain this verse to someone, if they asked me about it: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16)?
9. In my immediate circle of family, colleagues, and friends, who is in need of encouragement? What could I do to try and encourage them?
10. When was the last time I went out of my way to help someone who was in need, without looking for anything in return?



FURTHER READING

If you feel moved to continue reflecting and praying about this theme, you may find the following books helpful:

- *Forming Intentional Disciples*
by Sherry Weddell
- *Evangelizing Catholics: A Mission Manual for the New Evangelization*
by Scott Hahn
- *The Art of Christian Listening*
by Thomas Hart
- *Catholic Guide to Depression*
by Aaron Kheriaty and Fr. John Cihak
- *Arise from Darkness: What to Do When Life Doesn't Make Sense*
by Fr. Benedict Groeschel

CONTACT US

Please visit our website, www.RCSpirituality.org for more Retreat Guides and other spiritual resources.

If you liked *A Cure for Discouragement: A Retreat Guide for Easter*, please help sponsor future Retreat Guides by making a donation at www.RCSpirituality.org.

Follow us on Facebook.
www.facebook.com/retreatguide



Retreat Guides are a service of Regnum Christi and the Legionaries of Christ. www.RegnumChristi.org & www.LegionofChrist.org

Produced by Coronation. www.CoronationMedia.com

NOTES

