



Emmaus Bound

Sometimes in thinking of Christ, strange scenes come to mind. Far from the omni-potent Lord of heaven and earth, the immensely pathetic image of a majestic caged eagle flashes before my mind's eye. Or, I think of a mighty whale penned in a puny aquarium, or people stacked 80 stories in towering apartments, Eagles were not made to live in cages, nor whales to be the slaves of tiny tanks. People were not meant to subsist ant-like in concrete hives. And so, with Jesus, the Word who is the One came to move among His people to break their bread with them and weep their tears. Often, like an outcast, we drive Him into the wasteland of mere theory, or worse yet, transform Him into some sterile icon to embrace the very core of our lives.

Repeatedly we cry out in desperation, "Jesus where are you?" Then proceed to seek the God of life in realms other than life itself. Often, as some genie, we attempt to summon Him from the cask of intellectual speculation. We act as if theorizing is synonymous with loving communication. Whereas in truth every day we travel the Road to Emmaus with the mysterious stranger falling exactly into step. To our companions we speak of many things, of God and hope, of death and the promise of resurrection. All the while the Stranger wordlessly repeats over and over, "But I am with you. Look to your own lives for my presence. There you will find me, I am with you."

We continue to walk away from Jerusalem bewailing the fact that Jesus has died. All the

while the Stranger keeps step, waiting for us to break the bread of our own life experiences with Him, that the scales may fall and our eyes recognize who has been with us all the time. What if the standard religious terms that often seem so boring were not abstract theological concepts at all. What if they were, more than anything, descriptions of God taking His place in the midst of our human experiences? Which is to say, in the midst of our own lives. Perhaps the Stranger is telling we "Emmaus Bound" blind pilgrims – would you understand my Calvary? Then consider your own tears. For in that agony, and not a page in a book, it is an event that has not stopped happening since I took you for my own. Understand the agony of the alcoholic who in desperation shot himself to death before his wife and children. There I hang in all truth. Do you see that poor drunken Indian doing his war dance before the group of laughing youth in your downtown streets. Trading his heritage for a few quarters. If you cannot find the hill named Calvary there, then you shall never find it. There is an eighth grade girl in your town. She is selling narcotics to her classmates. One of them went deaf due to her traffic.

My cross is also your frustration, your loneliness, your failure. Your guilt and shame, falling like rain in your inner self, is the heart and soul of my cross. I am within you as you are within me.

It is there as well that you will find resurrection. Why reduce this continuing victory to a matter of new hats and white flowers. How terribly we both diminish in such a petrification. Would you know the meaning of death – dying to life, then seek it where life holds its court. Look deeply into the magnificent eyes of the young handicapped girl who shall never walk again and yet has retained her lust for life. She who will never walk again, tells all who listen, "I love life, I want to live every moment to the full". And she does. My resurrection is the policeman retaining his willingness to serve in kindness even though he has been severely wounded in the line of duty. The teenage boys working for pennies in a general hospital to bring joy to

those no one else had time for. If you would place flowers before the empty cave of death, let it be these. Living flowers with faces, hands and arms busy about the task of bringing life out of death. *"I have risen from the dead in you. Find me there or, for you, it has never happened."* The meaning of my coming to life is that you, too, through my power, will embrace life with such gusto that death will fall before you. Find it in that arena or find it not.

Countless times we have broken bread together. Have you tasted me? Have you found me in your embrace of the Eucharist? Look, do you see how dark it is in the room of those two ancient ladies living out the end of their days in the rest home? The night to them is a foretaste of death. They are frightened and alone. Quietly, silently do you see how they join, praying through the long hours? In truth they have found the meaning of my bread. Where charity and love prevail.

The poverty-stricken black minister and his community who shared what meager possessions they had with their sister recently released from the mental hospital. That is Eucharist. There I am.

All the lovely books that define, parse, historically trace the development of my body-sharing through the ages cannot substitute one second for a love-filled action of one of mine towards another. Such as the second when a man standing solitary and brave before all the monumental death in this world, offers a frightened child the only thing that could possibly make a difference to him, *"Trust me. I will not hurt you. Trust me."* If he accepts that trust he will know the meaning of my Eucharist.

The new fire you celebrate on the eve of Easter is not a sterile candle burning in a darkened building you call a Church. It is a mighty God-born hope, a hope deeper and greater than any fear that life can produce. I would send my New Fire rolling over the face of your earth if you would but have it. Just as I would send it flooding the domain of your consciousness if you would accept me. New Fire is the power of

joy, often tested as it rises above the reasons for despair. It can happen if you but believe. If you would but accept that I am in your midst, living my existence in the experiences of your life. Your homes can be centers of peace, your marriages a continually growing twining of lives, your hearts perpetually deepening altars of my daily sacrifice to the living God.

The project girl hungering for love, the settlement house manager who will not give up, the millions who dare risk, inch-by-inch, all are monuments to the power of my Fire. The New Fire that can renew this earth we both inhabit. It can if you will but find me. And to find me you must find yourself as I find myself in your neighbor- for there I have written my name among people.

If we are to find the Living God among the land of the living, we must look where He passed. Not simply in this event or that happening, but in the process whereby he went from the ordeal of death to the victory of life. The summary of all Christian living is in the passage of Calvary to the Resurrection. Each year as the week of New Fire, Holy Week, comes and goes, we are invited to enter again into not only the historical events of Jesus' life, but in our own identification with the Son of Man. Grasp its meaning now, and when it comes, it's meaning will explode anew in you.

