

What actually happened on the road to Emmaus? If we read the Gospel carefully, we can start imagining the state of mind of the two disciples. We can hear their overflowing disappointment: "But we were hoping that he would be the one." We can hear how intense their lives were. They really cared. We can sense, from the undertones in their conversation, how much they loved their country, how much they tried to be faithful to God in the law and how vivid was their hope for something new. Of course, their lives were far from perfect. They seem to suffer over the humiliation of the Roman occupation of Israel. They seem to feel the pain of divided and corrupted Judaism. They have an intense thirst for something better. They thought they had met a Messiah. The one who would be the answer to all of their worries. The one who would renew everything and everyone. He died and their disappointment was boundless.

Here is a place where I realize that I understand Cleopas and his companion surprisingly well: in their disappointment. I guess I didn't know how much we had in common. The care for many important things; the opinions about reality. The plans and expectations about how things should go and how they really go; and the exhausting tension between the two. I realize that I understand them too well for my own good. The world is not as predictable as we all pretend because people and things are never obvious and because, even when we speak about God, we have the tendency to turn him into either a product of our imagination or a projection of our needs. I am reluctant about all this because I know that my opinions, projections, and gods have a tendency to end up dead. The only thing they leave behind is disappointment. As with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, this would be a very sad and not very interesting reflection if the road ended there. But it didn't.

Their hearts were burning when they talked to the Unexpected Companion. The more they listened to his stories, the more they were drawn to him. And the more they were drawn to him, the more their disappointment and frustration were slowly transformed into hope. "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over."

"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...". All the important opinions the two men had, all the knowledge they used to explain their world, all their preconceptions about life and God and the world finally were crushed at the breaking of bread. For the first time maybe in their lives, they saw him for who he is. And, when they saw him, they realized who they were and what the world was. For the first time maybe in their lives, instead of being his companions, his conversationalists or advisors, they became his disciples. For the first time, they started seeing everything through Jesus -- his life, death, and resurrection -- instead of using him for their own purposes.

And now, as inconvenient as it is, the whole story becomes a task for me. Since I understand so well their disappointment, will I have courage to do what they did? Will I keep listening to the words of God and ask him to stay with me? Will I allow myself to throw away all the opinions and convictions that make me unable to recognize him, even when my heart is burning? Will I have humility and hope enough to become his disciple? Instead of continuing my walk on the road to Emmaus, will I be able to turn back to Jerusalem? In Jerusalem, the disciples will receive the greatest gift of all: the living fire of love of the Holy Spirit. Will I allow myself to receive that fire in my life?