

LIGHTING THE GOSPEL OF HOPE

1. Listen to the Word: Lk 24: 28-35

²⁸As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. ²⁹But 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. ³⁰And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. ³²Then 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?" ³³So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them ³⁴who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" ³⁵Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

2. Remain in the Word

Luke is the only evangelist who gives the account of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. Symbol of the community, they walk with a sad heart, weighed down by disappointments, discouragements, and frustrations. The pain of defeat pushes them to leave Jerusalem, their roots, the community itself, in search of other ways, alternative solutions. But Jesus knows them well, so He "came and walked with them" (v. 15). It is always God who takes the initiative, who takes the first step, who approaches the person, to listen to first! In His dead and risen Son, He walks with the human step and then leads us to walk with the divine step."¹

Jesus meets His disciples, enters into their history, warms their hearts, becomes the Word and Bread broken, and thus kindles hope. He evokes in them the significance of the Scriptures, makes Himself recognized, then guides them through the events that have upset them in order to interpret them. In the heart of the evening, He performs the gesture very familiar to everyone, unmistakable, unique! "He took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them" (v. 30). There is no doubt; it is Him, precisely Him. The heart burns, the night is illuminated, the path is resumed, takes them back to Jerusalem, with the community of the Risen One! Visibly, Jesus is no longer there, but He has left them the fire of the Spirit that drives them to return to be missionaries. The meditation of the Word of God and the breaking of the bread of the Eucharist invigorate the way, illuminate hope, so that it can light up the life of those who seek the encounter that saves! Hope, therefore, is born from the Word of God, is nourished by the gesture of giving the Eucharist, and finds its meaning in living within the ecclesial community.

3. Illuminated by the Word

Enlightened by the journey of the transformation of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, General Chapter XXIII of our Institute exhorts: *Broaden your vision. With the young, missionaries of hope and joy.* We are certain that the encounter with Jesus also transforms our daily life, creates and nourishes communion, makes us, together with the young people and the whole educating community, convinced evangelizers, prophecy for the world."²

¹ *Ibid* 380.

² INSTITUTE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, BROADEN YOUR VISION. WITH THE YOUNG, MISSIONARIES OF HOPE AND JOY. ACTS OF GENERAL CHAPTER XXIII, Rome 2014, 43.

The source of hope, the strength to go forward and share joy with young people is born from an authentic encounter with Christ. It is this encounter that enables us to overcome the challenges and temptations of disappointment, division, selfishness, and indifference in order to walk in joy and hope. Very useful in this regard are the recommendations of General Chapter XXIII: deepen and share the Word of God; make prayer an experience that nourishes our life, and place the Eucharistic Jesus at the center of community life.³ In this way we, can give a concrete response to the appeal of Pope Francis: "All the baptized, each with their own charism and ministry, be co-responsible, so that multiple signs of hope may bear witness to the presence of God in the world."⁴

4. Pray with the Word

Let us take a moment of silence to open our hearts to the action of the Holy Spirit, the Teacher, who guides us to understand the Word of God.

- Do I really desire to encounter the Word of God through personal and community prayer? How do I prepare for this encounter?
- Am I truly transformed by the encounter with the Word of God and with Jesus in the Eucharist to become a sign of joy and hope in the community and among young people? Is there is something that hinders this journey?

5. Together with Mary live the Word

Mary is our icon in listening to and putting into practice the Word of God. She "kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (Lk 2:19,51). With Jesus in her womb, she experienced the joy and hope of visiting her cousin Elizabeth. The painful events, the difficulties have not locked her in a self-referential attitude, but have opened her to hope. She is a sign of hope for peoples who suffer the pains of childbirth until justice sprouts. She is the missionary who comes to us to accompany us in life, opening our hearts to faith with her maternal affection. Like a true mother, she walks with us, struggles with us, and unceasingly pours out the closeness of God's love."⁵

Like Mary, the first woman missionary, like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we too are called to start again "with burning hearts, eyes open, feet on the road, to make other hearts burn with the Word of God, open more eyes to Jesus in the Eucharist, and invite everyone to walk together on the way of peace and salvation that God in Christ has given to humanity."⁶

Hail Mary, Virgin of hope, You are our Mother and Teacher; teach us to live together with the Word so that, like You, we may become prophets of joy and hope for the world. Amen!

³ Cf. INSTITUTE DAUGHTERS OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS, CONSTITUTIONS, art. 40.

⁴ FRANCIS, *Spes non confundit*, no.17.

⁵ ID., *Evangelii Gaudium*, n.286.

⁶ FRANCIS, *Message for the 97th World Missionary Day 2023*, no.3.