

**T**HEY WERE OVERWHELMED by a sinking feeling of sadness. Everything seemed to be collapsing around them. The excruciating death of their beloved Master was to them the sudden end of the hope he had so powerfully instilled in their thirsting hearts.

Their Master's death was a great humiliation. Everything around them came crashing down on that terrible Friday afternoon. It had indeed been a shattering experience, especially for that small circle of intimate friends who shared his life and vision.

Barely 48 hours had passed since that terrible drama on Calvary. It was a Passover to remember. It would remain ingrained in their hearts. They would remember it, so they thought, as the grim and grisly end to a dream which they had long cherished and nurtured.

Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free" (Lk 24, 21). So they pondered. The Belgian Jesuit theologian Jacques Dupuis remarks on their experience: "All hope being lost, what meaning could they give to the life of their dead Master?" His message, though still echoing in their dejected hearts, seemed to be reduced to smithereens.

Thus, with sadness wafting about in their minds and enveloping their hearts, they decided to leave the Holy City. Why not return to the countryside to where they belonged? And so they did. They trudged on and on.

The road to Emmaus was not short. It was something like 12 km long. The two men mumbled and grumbled about the terrible fate of their Master. Although they knew the road to their home village so well, the journey seemed never-ending. It seemed they had shackles on their aching feet. They hardly realised that someone was following them closely.

Heads down, their hearts swimming in a sea of gloom, they failed to notice the man walking in their shadow. They did not recognise the man. Raising his voice, the mysterious stranger startled them and caught their attention when he said: "What are all these things that you are discussing as you walk along?" (Lk 24, 17). Though a stranger, it was the time for them to share their deepest emotions with the man who had joined them on the journey.

**W**hat took place as they plodded on was an outpouring of grief. They expressed their previous expectations about the Messiah. And then came the anticlimax. He had shown himself to be "a prophet powerful in action and speech before God and the whole people... Our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to "be sentenced to death, and had him crucified" (Lk 24, 19-20). This was it. It was the stone rejected by the builders... which was to become the cornerstone.

The stranger, a man of compassion and empathy, proved to be a real companion to the other two. As it had been throughout his life, he was yet once more being true to his mission. A mission epitomised in wholehearted service... being for others and with others. And so, he strove to enlighten their darkened consciences. He sought to bathe them in his gentle, yet undying, light. Which reminds me of those beautiful words in the hymn by Cardinal Newman:

"Lead, kindly light,  
amid the encircling gloom,  
Lead though me on!  
The night is dark, and I am far  
from home.  
Lead Thou me on!  
Keep thou my feet;  
I do not ask to see the distant  
scene:

one step enough for me".  
Well, the encircling gloom started to be dispelled: "You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that he should suffer before entering into his glory?" (Lk 24, 25-26). The unending journey to Emmaus seemed to lapse into timelessness. They hardly realised that they had reached their destination. The stranger's mysterious and enlightening presence shook their predicament to its very foundations. Time had flown... or had they experi-

enced the timelessness of the Eternal Word which had just spoken to them?

Stopping at an inn, our two men instinctively invited the stranger to share their frugal meal. Their hearts had already experienced an initial transformation. They felt they had to be welcoming. They had to imitate the Good Samaritan. Their hearts of stone were already becoming hearts of flesh.

Their hearts began beating fast when they saw him take the bread, break it and bless it. Their hearts beat even faster, as they unsuccessfully tried to embrace him. He had vanished before them. Hardly had they realised that he had been embracing them all the way to Emmaus!

The two men had by now been radically transformed. Overpowered by joy, they rushed out of the inn and ran to the road, while they shouted: "Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?" (Lk 24, 32) They could not contain the

fervour gushing from their hearts. They had to share this tremendous experience with their brethren. Off they set, back to Jerusalem!

Forgetting they had just made that painful journey... putting aside all their previous fears... although it was dark and dangerous to travel... they ran and ran with amazing speed. Though the paving stones' their feet stepped upon were the same ones they had trudged upon a couple of hours earlier, the journey was remarkably different. From the passive meandering of pessimism they now rushed forth with active torrents of optimism.

It was a revolutionary passage from the darkness of death to the invincible light of true life. This had indeed been the true night of all nights. How eloquent are the impressive words of Asterius of Amasea (d.

410) who addresses the Easter vigil in these terms:

"O night clearer than the day!  
O night more luminous than the sun  
O night whiter than the snow!  
giving more light than our torches,  
sweeter than Paradise!  
O night that knows no darkness,  
driving away our sleep...  
Night in which the Heir  
brings the heirs into eternity".

Reflecting on the Emmaus episode in chapter 24 of Luke's Gospel, the Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, asserts that "on that evening of the great Easter day, even Emmaus felt the tremor of the resurrection. As the two disciples were breaking bread, Christ revealed the most tremendous news ever heard in human history: he is forevermore the risen one, the one who is eternally

present. With him it is always day, and night brings no fear... And yet, after two thousand years, our human race seems still to be journeying toward Emmaus like the two disciples, far from the saving cross, far from the hope of life".

And Cardinal Martini, in his inimitable and vigorous style, continues to urge us and to encourage us, while filling us with missionary zeal: "Let us return to Jerusalem. Let us set out again from Emmaus. Distractions and fatigue have estranged us and locked us up in our house of Emmaus... Courage! Let us set out! The day is already waning, but Christ will give light for the road".

This is the Easter joy which fills the whole earth. Being a Christian, affirms Dupuis, does not consist in venerating a dead master or keeping his memory alive or simply putting his teachings into practice. It means, he explains, believing that Jesus is alive today because he was raised from the dead by the Father. It means transmitting this paschal joy to all men and women in the world. It means leaving Emmaus and running back to Jerusalem while proclaiming: "He is truly risen! Alleluia! Courage! Let us set out!"

# Emmaus!

by Rev. Dr Hector M. Scerri



**Take your  
pick  
and note the  
difference!**

**306090**

Have you ever wanted a Bank account that draws together the best features of savings and fixed accounts? If you are after the freedom of depositing into your account regularly and the opportunity to access your money, after a short notice period, a BOV Notice Account offers the right combination!

For further details, contact your nearest BOV Branch.

Customer Care  
FREEPHONE  
0800-77-31-30

**BOV Notice Account**

**BOV**

http://www.bov.com  
e-mail: customercare@bov.com