

BIBLICAL PAGES

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Jesus' places and relations

Lectio n° 2 On the road... a deep gaze

Introduction

In this second unit we are on the road. We have leaved the house, the place of security, and must start walking.

In the Old Testament the Road, the 'way', mainly refers to the experience of Exodus, when God traced a road in the desert so that Israel could go out of Egypt and of slavery.

The other places where the term 'way' occurs are:

- Ex 18:20. Here the way refers to the way of life.
- In Dt, God commands to choose between the way of life and the way of death (Dt 30:15-16, 19).
- The prophet Jeremiah calls the Law "the way of the Lord".
- It is always God who shows us the path of life (Ps 16:11).

Thus the Scriptures make us understand that the path to liberation from slavery is closely related to the law of God, seen as the way that in the desert allowed Israel to reach their destination, the promised land.

St Mark (from whose Gospel our passage is taken) first refers to the 'way' when St John the Baptist quotes the prophet Isaiah, "Prepare a way for the Lord!"

However, very soon the way becomes the place where the seed is sown but does not bear fruit, because "the birds came and ate it up".

However, the true road is the one traced and followed by Jesus: it is the road leading to Jerusalem.

The prophecies of the Passion to the disciples take place on the road: the road is therefore the place of discipleship.

The road refers to Jesus' life, His lifestyle, and is the place where many of His encounters occur, ending up in acceptance or rejection of His lifestyle, of His life. Those who accept Him will follow Him up to Jerusalem, up to the cross and resurrection.

The passage we are dealing with relates Jesus' encounter with a rich young man. This encounter could end up in liberation, in an 'exodus' from an already trodden path. The young man's quest for eternal life is similar to Israel's quest for the

promised land, when they came out of Egypt, and now actualized by Jesus' death and resurrection.

We have to tread on the path to liberation... Let us go out on the road then.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit

*Guide our steps, Holy Spirit of Christ,
towards the way of life.*

*Through the Word we have listened to
open up for us the narrow path,
a path full of encounters and void of solitude,
perfumed by sharing, not by oppression.*

*It is a path of liberation
where everything is possible,
if You let us welcome the Word
as if it were the gaze of the Master,
looking steadily at us and loving us,
calling us.*

1. Lectio

(to read the Word / to listen to it)

Mark 10:17-27

17 He was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before Him and put this question to Him, 'Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 18 Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19 You know the commandments: You shall not kill; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not give false witness; You shall not defraud; Honour your father and mother.'

20 And he said to Him, 'Master, I have kept all these since my earliest days.' 21 Jesus looked steadily at him and He was filled with love for him, and He said, 'You need to do one thing more. Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; then come, follow me.' 22 But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

23 Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God!' 24 The disciples were astounded by these words, but Jesus insisted, 'My children,' He said to them, 'how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25 It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for someone rich to enter the Kingdom of God.'

26 They were more astonished than ever, saying to one another, 'In that case, who can be saved?' 27 Jesus gazed at them and said, 'By human resources it is impossible, but not for God: because for God everything is possible.'

This is Chapter 10 of St Mark's Gospel. We are already beyond the turning point of St Peter's profession (Mk 8:29), which provided a first answer to the question about Jesus' identity, the key issue of St Mark's Gospel.

Exactly as our passage, Mk 8:29 is set on the road, and on the road the disciples are arguing about 'who is the greatest' (Mk 9:34).

Jesus and His disciples are travelling through Galilee, then they come to Capernaum, then they cross Judaea and go into Trans-Jordan. The crowds gather once again around Jesus and He teaches them. On His journey to Jerusalem He has already given the disciples two prophecies of the approaching Passion (8:31; 9:31), but they do not understand Him.

The meeting between Jesus and the rich young man occurs also on that road. Apparently it is a failure, occurring just before the third prophecy of the Passion (10:33). Jesus does not waver and goes on treading His path, while His disciples are worried and full of fears.

Then they come to Jericho, and while they are leaving the city we encounter Bartimaeus, the blind man healed by Jesus, who represents the good disciple, able to follow Jesus (10:52).

Let us divide the text into its parts:

- A run, a question
- Jesus questions the man
- Jesus refers him to the commandments
- Jesus loves him and shows him the way
- Jesus refers His disciples to God's work

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A run, a question

A man runs up to Jesus and kneels before Him. The road is a place where many people pass, a place where many good occasions occur (occasions that can be taken or not, meetings that one should take advantage of). The rich young man must have heard about Jesus a lot, given that he regards Him as a Master to be stopped on His journey and questioned. He swiftly runs up to Jesus, in order for Him not to disappear. He has a question for Him, and begs Him to show him the way of life or, better, the one thing he has to do "to inherit eternal life". This question is the very existential question occurring here and there throughout the whole of Scripture. The Psalms call it 'the quest for the face of God' 'the quest for salvation'. The Psalms called 'Songs of Ascent' celebrate the ascent to the place where God can be met, and the steep road is the path that one has to tread in order to reach God's place, the Temple. The pilgrims used to go up in a procession; the rich young man runs up to Jesus. He is impulsive, he is driven by haste, he has to take advantage of the moment; he is very near to his goal, there is just a little thing more to do in order to be perfect, and the Good Master will reveal to him what that is.

We can see that in St Mark the term 'odòs', 'road', is preceded by various prepositions. When he refers to the disciples' road, he uses 'en' ("in the road"). When he refers to Bartimaeus, before Bartimaeus follows Him, he uses 'para'

("near"); when Bartimaeus follows Jesus, he uses 'en' ("in the road"), exactly like for the disciples. In the passage we are dealing with he uses 'eis' ("into").

We can infer from that that St Mark is suggesting us that the journey has different stages. But at what stage is the rich young man? Given that the preposition 'eis' has been used, we deduce that he is at the beginning of the journey, even though he believes to be near the goal. He is at the beginning of that path traced by Jesus through His life, of that way of life he can enter or not. Here the paradox of "making" in order to "inherit" comes to the fore. The inheritance must be welcomed, must be received as children; it cannot be conquered through some work.

Jesus questions the man

The rich young man calls Jesus 'Good Master'. How does Jesus react? He does not take for granted the appellative addressed to Him. "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." Jesus does not appear to be welcoming... It is as if He wanted to highlight the relation with God, to refer to God the question about the way of life.

The Psalms clearly state that God is the One who can "teach the way of life" (Ps 16:11) and that "the Lord is merciful and upright" (Ps 116:5). He is the One inviting us "to take the good way" (Jr 6:16).

Jesus' question is meant to refer to the Father both the issue that has been posed to Him and His being a master as well as His mission. As if the true question were in fact: "You are coming to me, but who am I in your view? Who is God for you? Do you really see God – who alone is good – in me?"

Jesus wants to make the rich young man understand the weight of his words, of his statements, and to focus on the commandment "You shall have no other god to rival me" (Ex 20:3). Later on, matter-of-factly, the man will address Jesus with the appellative 'Master'.

Jesus refers him to the commandments

The Master is a master because He shows the way: Jesus points to the way that God Himself gave, the Torah, which means 'guidance' and 'direction' on the path. Meeting Jesus opens one up to the very path whose starting point are the commandments. To go and meet Jesus is not meant to receive a formula, to advance one's learning, to get a diploma of perfection. To meet Jesus means to enter His pedagogy, to attend His school, where the Master helps His students start from what they already know – in this case from God's law – but to surpass it. How?

After showing the rich young man the One who alone is good, Jesus reminds him of the necessary relation with his neighbour, highlighting dispossession and justice (He quotes just the commandments referring to one's neighbour and one precept more).

The rich young man has kept all these since his earliest days. What next?

In fact, the Greek term is not ‘to observe’, but ‘not to violate’, ‘to protect’. Jesus is trying to make the rich young man overcome his spiritual self-centredness and to make him grow, leading him from youth (where he seems to be rooted in) to maturity. The term ‘neotetos’, ‘youth’, means in fact ‘new’, ‘recent’, and provides a sense of beginning. Jesus is trying to push the rich young man beyond the reception of the love commandments as orders ‘not to do’ something, towards a maturity in the relationship, by giving oneself. Not to violate the commandments is not enough, what is needed is ‘to love’.

In St Luke’s Gospel the question about eternal life (Lk 10:25) prompts Jesus to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan: our neighbour is not an object but the subject letting us conquer eternal life.

If we compare St Luke’s text with ours, we can say that Jesus always answers referring to the Law (Lk 10:27-28). But His answers always warn us not to make use of others in order to put ourselves on a pedestal, boasting about our merits.

On the contrary, we depend upon others when we have to love. Thanks to others we can go out of ourselves and start walking on the path leading to eternal life, a life of love.

Jesus loves him and shows him the way

But what is that way of love? Jesus gazes at him. More precisely, the text says ‘looks inside him’. Is that gaze an inquisitive and judging look? No, it isn’t. Jesus looks steadily at him and He is filled with love for him.

This is not just a feeling, but His very way of relating to him, His decision to give Himself as a gift to him in that very moment. This is the one and only line where it is said that Jesus loved someone. Therefore, it is very relevant. In addition to that, this love is not silent. “He gazed at him and He loved him”. The conjunction ‘and’ links together love and word: by loving, Jesus reveals Himself; but He also reveals man to himself, man’s true identity. He can reveal the way, made specially for him, because He has looked inside him.

“You need to do one thing more...” In fact, the Greek text makes use of ‘en’, ‘one’, a pronoun in its neutral form. Then we can say, “You need to do not one thing but unity.” Let us remember Mk 12:28-34: love God and neighbour (“There is no commandment greater than these”, Mk 12:31). What is missing in the rich young man’s case? That the two guiding lights of life ‘walk’ together, become one. What is missing is unity between God and neighbour.

St Mark presents a scene that is a ‘crescendo’: now Jesus speaks clearly, He is very direct but not invasive. Each of His words, each of His invitations, is enclosed by that gaze that looks into man’s depths and loves – that is, entrusts Himself and entrust to us the secret of life, of His life and of the other’s happiness.

“You need to do one thing more. Go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in Heaven; then come, follow me.” This is the path of love.

Jesus invites the man not to be content with the beginning of the journey, but to go into the road and follow Him, so that love for God and love for neighbour may be one, as they are in Him... but not immediately. In fact there is a well defined space between two opposite movements: “go” / “come”.

It is necessary for him to go away in order to free himself from all that binds him; and then he can come back to Jesus, regarding Him as his one and only choice, his true path and way of loving.

What he has to leave behind must be sold, in order to be distributed to the poor: it is not just an ascetical path, where one relates only with God and cleanses and frees himself, but also a path of fraternity and of sharing.

Jesus' pedagogy invites the man to exchange his own riches for a new precious treasure. There are treasures that cannot be touched with the hands, that cannot be looked at, that cannot be counted. The treasure of Heaven is the Kingdom of Heaven's, in which the seed of love can be fruitful, enriching those who freely give as they have received what truly gives joy and, consequently, are able to love.

Then, is it true that being poor is enough to follow Jesus? Or rather, that we need to be free in order to love, give ourselves with no bounds, just rich of the love that has been given to us?

Jesus has shown us the way of life: Himself. To divest oneself of everything is the new beginning, creating unity, and coupling the entrusting to the One who alone is good with fraternal love. Our reliance on God must be coupled with self-denial (8:34-35) and the fight against self-centredness, which together may lead us to genuine joy. It is reasonable to think that that cannot be learnt overnight. We can learn that only if we carry the cross of the difference between what we really are and what is Jesus, preceding us. We must go on from that deep and loving gaze of Jesus, and in a strong relationship with Him we must learn to walk like Him and with Him. The way of life is not just made up of a dramatic gesture (to leave everything) but also of staying always in touch with the concrete and real image of love for God and neighbour, ie with the Master.

If Jesus waits until the end to say “Come and follow me”, thus clearly stating that He is THE One we must refer to, it is not because what is lacking is an ascetical renunciation, but an evangelical conversion: to welcome the Good News, Jesus, whose way of life is love and opens us up to a life of love, the eternal life, a life that becomes gift, maturity.

The path we have to follow is Him: “Come here”. The path we have to tread is Him: “Follow me”. We are on the road so that we can walk with Him and gradually absorb His ethos, His way of thinking and living.

“But his face fell at these words and he went away sad...” The Greek text says, ‘darkened’. He does not start walking on the way of discipleship and, above all, on the way of joy. He gives up his precious question, the quest of his whole life, and a very important relationship. He renounces to live under that gaze which

looked into his depths, and which entrusted itself to him as a gift and as the origin of joy, opening up to a life whose vocation is fullness.

The sadness of the rich young man, going back home, is maybe due to the awareness of a vital relationship aborted... What remains is the fear of losing everything.

Sadness is the beneficial signal warning him of the illness he has to be cured of: a life incapable of becoming gift, of welcoming true joy.

Jesus refers His disciples to God's work

In spite of all that, Jesus does not stop relating to us as THE gift. The sadness becomes a seed for a future encounter. A seed which seems destined to be eaten by birds... But if the young man has been touched and moved, will that seed prompt him to go back to Jesus?

Jesus is Himself the seed sown on the road, and He is not afraid of any apparent failure, of His gift being rejected. He does not reply to the man, He lets him free to go away. Jesus' gaze is wider and greater: it is realistic but also aware of the width of the Kingdom of God.

Looking around, as if He were looking for those who stand beside Him as disciples, Jesus exclaims: "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God!" In Mk 4:19, the "lure of riches and all the other passions come in to choke the Word", preventing the seed from growing. In fact, it is hard to enter the Kingdom of God, exactly as it would be hard for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle.

Jesus is aware of man's possibilities as well as of limits, and He is not worried. On the contrary, the disciples are indeed worried: at the time, richness used to be considered a blessing. "In that case, who can be saved?"

Once again Jesus gazes into the disciples' depths. The term used here is the same as the one used for the rich young man. Once again Jesus has to correct them: from personal works to welcoming the gift. Like the rich young man, the disciples are concerned about salvation as the fruit of human resources, but Jesus reminds them of the gift of grace: nothing is impossible for God. Within the relationship with Jesus, there is a future in spite of all the failures. Jesus becomes a sign of hope, the voice of God that St Mark depicts as a sower relentlessly "scattering seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know." (4:26-27)

What is growing in the rich young man? That gaze he encountered is impressed upon him... the memory of a Master who keeps on trusting in man, asking him to welcome Him as he would do with a little child (9:37), and to welcome the Kingdom of God like a little child would do (10:15).

2. Meditatio

(to meditate on the Word / to let it resound)

- Am I provoked by Jesus' Word or do I rather wish that He were subject to my own plans?
- When relating to other, do I have the tendency to be the star, attracting people more to myself than to God instead?
- How is my gaze? Is it inquisitive, judgemental? How do I look at all those who live near me? Am I trusting? Am I able to give myself as a gift to others?
- Do I let others be themselves, with no expectations on my part? Do I lack trust in the future of God?

Numbers 8 and 17 of our Rule of Life prompt us to acknowledge Grace dwelling in us. It is simple to share our riches, so that our gaze can become deep and wide as Jesus', and we can become companions on the 'road of life' of our brothers and sisters.

“By His grace, in a mysterious way, we become a special sign of the world to come and a call for all people to live waiting for the Lord's return.” (n° 8)

“Mindful that the gifts you have received must be shared with your brothers and sisters, you shall put yourself at your Sisters' as well as at everybody else's disposal. By your interior poverty you will be made attentive to them, and you will also be made capable of welcoming, being open to and exchanging views with them.” (n° 17)

A witness

My name is Greta, I'm 29 and I come from the Province of Bologna. I took part in the European project 'Grow up together', at the 'Citadel Heaven' of the 'New Horizons' Association in Frosinone. There I experienced what to grow up together really means, in the company of friends that by now have become my family.

Enthusiasm was the first emotion I felt there, and it never left me, not even when I was experiencing some difficulties. Through the different activities of the project I came to know children, teenagers, sons and daughters, mothers and fathers, young and old, and I devoted myself to them with all my strength.

I had to get rid of my 'masks' and becoming more and more aware of my self in order to be at their service, giving all of myself, and also to be able to express that joy that was hidden inside me.

The activity that opened up my heart was the summer camp with children aged 5-11. During that service each and every of the children's gazes and gestures made me astonished, and led me to question myself on various issues.

The strongest memory of the whole project is the gaze full of joy of a child who stopped to look at my eyes.

J. is a 5-year-old child who attended all the activities of the summer camp.

He was very vivacious, always looking for grown-ups' attention, looking for a gaze that he could trust.

Just a few days of the summer camp had passed, but I was immediately attracted by that little boy. One day, at lunch, while I was wiping away tomato juice from his lips, J. gave me a gaze full of tenderness and trust, gratitude and love.

That was the gaze that established between us a new relationship, characterized by mutual trust, and based upon mutual love and deep attention to each other.

Now, after 11 months at the Citadel, I have learnt to know my self more deeply; and I have discovered that I'm very similar to J. I have acknowledged that I need to be looked after, to be listened to, to be helped and loved, first of all by myself, and then by the people who live near me, who know me and who love me.

That gaze that it's alive in me, opened me up to a relationship with my self, deeper and more genuine. It is the gaze of the child Greta, welcomed by the grown-up Greta, who is able to love her self. Now I'm more self-confident as well as more steadfast and independent.

Now I'm a young woman who is able to give herself to others with the same simplicity and trust of a child.

Finally, I'm a woman who loves her own self and who deeply loves her own needs, and who feels she is beautiful and who is happy with her self.

I'm really grateful for having the opportunity to experience all that. That experience helped me greatly to reach my goals; and today I'm hopeful when I think about my future.

3. Oratio

(to pray the Word / to repeat it)

I sometimes go far away, but I'm not happy.

I sometimes go far away, with nostalgia in my heart.

I sometimes go far away, trying to find a passage to go beyond.

Let me pass, Master, through that narrow passage... The hunches prevent me from doing that.

However, I heard there is hope for a camel too.

It is a question of gaze, of a new perspective...

*Give me please that deep gaze, able to see beyond,
able to see what is impossible to men but possible to God,
able to trust in me, but leaving me free.*

Yes, it is a gift of grace.

On the road, I will be able to look exactly as You do.

Then I will be divested of my indifference...

*And then, Master, I will be able to welcome others on my hunches,
the burden will not crush me*

*but I will become finally “a little one”
who is able to enter the Kingdom.*

4. Contemplatio **(to contemplate the Word / silence)**

Let us allow the deep gaze of Jesus to go down into our depths... And may we not avert our gaze or else the joy of the meeting will abandon us.

5. Collatio **(to share the Word)**

Let us share the gifts we have received by confronting ourselves with the Word, so that our talking with God may turn into our talking with our sisters too.