

# **BIBLICAL PAGES**

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## **Jesus' places and relations**

### **Lectio n° 2**

#### **An encounter along the road. A call, not an election**

The setting of this episode is the road. There we will follow Jesus establishing relations with people. What does 'meeting Jesus' mean in our text? Does it mean to present oneself to Jesus and ask to be one of His disciples? Or to choose Him as a Rabbi? Or, in a deeper way, to discover that one has been called and that the call implies following Jesus' own path? We will see that, according to St Luke, both the road and the journey have to do with Jesus' very own life.

#### **Let us invoke the Holy Spirit**

*Come, Holy Spirit, come!*

*Pour down Your Love on me,  
with all its riches and fruitfulness.*

*May it become in me a spring of Life, of Your immortal Life.*

*But how can I come to You,  
without being totally ready for,  
docile, open to Your effusion?*

*Lord, speak! What do You want me to do?*

*I'm trying to be attentive to the soft murmuring of Your Spirit  
in order to grasp what Your plans may be;  
in order to open myself up to the mysterious 'invasion'  
of Your mercy.*

*Help me to give my whole life to You  
without asking You explanations.*

*It will be a gesture of love, of trust,  
and hopefully it will prompt You to violently enter my existence,  
as the munificent Lord that You are.*

*(Card. Anastasio Ballestrero)*

### **1. Lectio**

**(to read the Word / to listen to it)**

**Luke 9:57-62**

*57 As he travelled along they met a man on the road who said to Him, 'I will follow You wherever You go'. 58 Jesus answered, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'*

*59 Another to whom He said, 'Follow me,' replied, 'Let me go and bury my father first.' 60 But He answered, 'Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God.'*

*61 Another said, 'I will follow You, sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home.' 62 Jesus said to him, 'Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.'*

This passage is part of Chapter 9 of St Luke's Gospel. The evangelist is describing the last section of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (9:51-19:28).

The decisive turning point occurs immediately before the events we are dealing with: "Now it happened that as the time drew near for Him to be taken up, He resolutely turned His face towards Jerusalem..." (9:51) Thus St Luke becomes the evangelist of Jesus' journey, of His path / way from Galilee to Jerusalem. In Acts 9:2 the apostles are called "the followers of the Way", and the whole text by St Luke is regarded as "the journey of the Word" (Massimo Grilli). Consequently, we can say that Jesus' way is the Way of the Word, the Way of the Church. In fact, St Luke is presenting the faith as a way, a path with distinctive features.

In Luke 4:30, the evangelist had already said that "He walked away". This verb is in the imperfect tense, which implies a duration. The whole of Jesus' life is a journey, but that ideal journey is also the disciples' journey, it is the way the disciples have to follow in order to follow their Master. Thus, a portrait of the ideal disciple is painted by St Luke, and he shows it to each and every Christian man or woman of all ages.

On the way, many encounters occur and relations are established: from 9:51 onwards, those encounters and relations make up Jesus' emotional milieu, as well as that of all the people following Him. Those are the very features of the 'sequela' ('following'): when the disciples preceding Jesus stray from His motivations and don't fall in with His views, He "turns and rebukes them" (9:55). In Greek the verb used here refers to "turning one's shoulders". To show one's shoulder to somebody means "Stay behind me", or in other words, "Follow me". Even though they have been sent ahead of Him "to make preparations for Him" (9:52), they have to 'stay behind' the Master anyway...

Then, let us examine our passage, dealing with some of Jesus' encounters along His way to Jerusalem (9:57-62), trying to discover St Luke's hints at the characteristics of the journey, and to find out how we should 'stay behind' / follow Jesus.

Let us divide the text into its parts:

- To listen 9:57-58
- To free 9:59-60
- To look ahead 9:61-62

### To listen

*57 As the travelled along they met a man on the road who said to Him, 'I will follow You wherever You go'. 58 Jesus answered, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.'*

On the road a few men approach Jesus. One of them swears that he will join Jesus on His journey: "I will follow You..." And he seems to be aware that there is a destination, even though indefinite: "...wherever You go". He seems to foresee a long journey. He is not wrong, but Jesus seems to discourage him. In fact, the point is not to journey together, walking a long way, or to go through many places, but rather to enter the same dynamics of Jesus' life, and to walk on His same 'way' / 'path'. Jesus seems to suggest some characteristics of the 'way'...

- There are neither 'holes' nor 'nests', ie there are no places of refuge, no home: everything in Jesus' life is a continual dynamism, a way, but also a process inevitably leading him to experience that life is destined to perish and / or that life does not belong to us and that we have to give it away: life is destined to become the expression of one's liberty to welcome one's mission, without objecting to it in any way. Jesus does not have a house, a nest, a hole; He does not go on holiday, He does not have a place where to lay His head. But His is neither 'spirit of sacrifice' nor 'ascetic effort' nor 'hyperactivity'. What does He mean then?
- If we look for the verb 'to lay one's head', used just a few times in the gospels, we find it at Jesus' crucifixion in St John's Gospel: "...bowing His head He gave up His spirit" (Jn 19). Vignola highlights that on the cross Jesus bows His head first, as a sign of obedience, then He gives up His spirit. This little detail makes us go back to our line 58, and we understand that the same verb used by St Luke suggests that the one and only place where one can lay his head, the one and only 'place of refuge', the one and only 'destination', is obedience.

St Luke clarifies what the features of Jesus' life and His destination are: they are a path of obedience to the Father, which means to have no security, not to stand still but to go ahead and improve one's listening ('ob-audientia', 'obedience'). Only on the Cross, in His extreme and utter obedience, listening to the Father that He reveals as Mercy, Jesus will be able to rest given that, as He says in St John's Gospel, "Everything is fulfilled" (Jn 19:30). But what has been fulfilled?

According to St John, the gift of the Spirit, the gift of God's Life to each and every man or woman in all the ages, is fulfilled.

In St Luke's Gospel the Cross is the utter fulfilment of 'today', of the many 'today's' of his Gospel: the [to]day of salvation; the [to]day of the entrance into the kingdom... This latter case occurs when the good thief asks Jesus to remember him... And Jesus' remembrance brings him into the communion with the Father.

Should we conclude then that Jesus is rejecting that chap's 'sequela' (following)? Is it true that He tries to discourage him? Matter-of-factly, Jesus is very direct,

clear in his answers: He does not want to be an idol, to have 'fans'. He does not admit into His circle those who would join it in a superficial way. From these first lines we see that Jesus' will is to make all those who approach Him deeply aware of the extreme consequences of following Him. And to tell them how they should walk on the road with Him, with His same motivations and perspective. He seems to stress the idea that following Him is not a choice in accordance with one's own expectations, ie choosing a particular rabbi instead of another.

And reaching the destination is not the one and only point of walking with Him: one must subscribe to a greater obedience, that must become the way one has to run on (cf Ps 119:32). Listening / obedience must precede each and every of one's own initiatives; our destination is communion with the Father. Liberty is also a 'way', conducive to welcoming / listening / obedience and finally to communion with Him.

### To free

*59 Another to whom He said, 'Follow me,' replied, 'Let me go and bury my father first.' 60 But He answered, 'Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God.'*

Jesus calls. We remind St John's Gospel: "You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last." (Jn 15:16) St Luke seems to add a second step: if listening must precede taking initiative, the 'sequela' originates from a call. If the way is the path of the Word, one must listen to the Word "which is being fulfilled even while you are listening" (Lk 4:21). The Word is fulfilled because it is listened to, and it becomes history. But what is the content of the word that Jesus is proclaiming and that is being fulfilled?

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
for He has anointed me  
to bring the good news to the afflicted.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives...  
to proclaim a year of favour from the Lord" (Lk 4:18-19)

The call demands that we respond to Jesus' proposal to enter His very way. After that programmatic discourse, St Luke states that Jesus, being rejected, goes on to another village. Behind His journey we can see a precise plan, going on in time. Those who have been called share His same dynamics, the same commission that Jesus received from the Father (cf Lk 4:18).

Which history is to be fulfilled when responding to the call and to the commissioning? A history of life ("Spirit"), of belonging ("anointed"), of liberation of the poor and the oppressed. That 'today' becomes "a year of favour from the Lord". Such is the proclamation of the Kingdom in Lk 4:18-19.

In St Luke's Gospel, Jesus stresses the fact that "the Kingdom of God is among you" (Lk 17:21). He is at the same time the proclaimer, the witness and the

protagonist of the establishing of that Kingdom, a Kingdom whose presence, discreet but nonetheless working, one has to welcome.

Then, is the merciful practice of burying one's father wrong? And can the dead bury their dead? No, of course, but Jesus is inviting the man to pass from a dead existence to real life, to make life grow, not to care for him who begot him in the past, ie his father. The father is the past, and he cannot give life once again.

The call lets the man enter the river of grace, the time of liberation of the poor and the oppressed. That time is not the hour when one has to bury the dead, but to give life: "Go and spread the news of the Kingdom of God". The man is commissioned to have a share in Jesus' mission, the mission Jesus has been sent to fulfil. In Lk 10:9, the seventy-two disciples are sent out in pairs and have to say, "The Kingdom of God is very near to you".

### To look ahead

*61 Another said, 'I will follow You, sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home.'* *62 Jesus said to him, 'Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God.'*

Here we find another hint at what we should do on the way we are walking on with Jesus. We must look ahead, exactly like Jesus who "resolutely turned His face towards Jerusalem" (Lk 9:51). We must follow His dynamism, determination and seriousness.

Once again we wonder: why couldn't the man say good-bye to his people? Elisha was granted that (cf 1 K 19:21). Is Jesus more demanding?

No, the point is not to be more demanding, strict on Jesus' part, or to teach detachment, but rather for the man not to feel nostalgia, not to go on the road with Jesus while constantly looking back, feeling a loss, feeling regret, like Israel who regretted its past life in Egypt and wasn't able to live in the present, carrying in itself the promise of liberation.

Somebody who lives regretting the past, feeling nostalgia for it, is not fit for the Kingdom of God, which is 'expansion', 'yeast', proclamation of liberation, as we have already seen.

The initial feature of freedom does not mean to free ourselves from our genuine affective bonds, but rather to have the liberty to run to Jesus and to expand ourselves in love, bringing to Him all those that have been given to us.

It is as if the request to walk straight ahead referred to the proclamation of a kingdom equal to a widening of love, overcoming its limitations and getting rid of any closeness in our relations, so that fraternity may grow. This kind of love digs a deep furrow.

## **2. Meditatio**

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

- Jesus is inviting us to be free as well as obedient. Do I feel free towards my sisters? Am I freeing them, while putting into practice mutual obedience in love? Is it really conducive to communion?
- We have all been chosen by the Lord as listeners of the Word. Did I choose a project myself, did I choose an ideal life? Or am I rather in dialogue with the Word? Do I listen to it so that I may be sent? Is my life conveying the idea that the Kingdom is already here, that the Living One is in our midst so that He may turn us into Life-giving women, not builders of graves?
- Do I look ahead or do I feel nostalgia for the past, recriminating about the present? What about my affectivity? Am I able to broaden my affective world in order to love exclusively Christ, and to find back in Him any other affection as well as conversely His presence in everyone?

Below you will find a witness making it clear that the call does not deface our persons; and that listening and obedience do not brake our creativity. In fact, they rather lead us towards selflessness and genuine freedom.

*God is calling us by our name. Through little hints, persons, events or words that He puts on our way, He shows us the way to follow Him and be one with Him.*

*But how can I build my future? Up to which point what is requested from me is really an opportunity and not a way predetermined by someone else who has thought everything in details in my place?*

*When we are deprived of something we can see the way more clearly.*

*When we are deprived of everything, we can see what in our lives is really durable and does not perish; what is important and what is useless; what we must invest on and what makes us lose all. What is left in my hands after losing everything? Life and the call. My vocation, and all the nuances referring to me, like the sense of duty, hope, leadership... What my vocation is, how I did welcome it and understood it, how I have responded to it while giving back my life to God as a gift. In sufferings we are deprived of everything: the pleasure of the body is replaced by sorrow, hope is replaced by fear. We can't enjoy ourselves, we can't help others, we cannot relax. But when we are feeling all that, we become aware of the direction our lives are taking, and whether or not we are going out to meet God, and whether we are responding to His voice or rather ignoring Him, letting His words have no effect on our lives.*

*Where does my vocation come from, then?*

*Our vocation is built up in time, keeping our hands in God's very hands. At first it is defined by our good qualities and shortcomings but then it is able to grow thanks to our aspirations and desires. With the passing of*

*time, we mould it, becoming the authors of our lives, starting from little things and choices. Could God ask me to do something that I do not desire, that I am not fit for? Of course not, even though at times we are surprised or feel delusion for what God is offering us... However, we have to overcome our laziness, and our fear of committing ourselves and taking the first step, because afterwards everything will be more beautiful.*

*Where is my freedom, then? Was I given birth in order to retrace the furrows that Someone greater than me has already traced for me? Where is the possibility of being the author of my destiny fulfilled?*

*All of us are lucky that we can choose among many things. After finishing high school, many of us could go to university, and chose one specific faculty among many. We have wealth, intelligence, support from our families.*

*Vocation is the perfect mix between the Word of God upon us and our daily choices, big or little as they may be. Jesus' vocation is also well defined: "I was born for this; I came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth" (Jn 18:37-38). Once again my liberty is fulfilled in the effort of giving myself away. If it is walled up by my selfishness it will not be fulfilled and it will not bear fruit. Liberty is mine, but to be given to others as a gift. This will lead me to holiness. This will lead me and all those that I love to God.*

*(Kevin).*

### **3. Oratio**

**(to pray the Word / to repeat it)**

*Lord, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,  
God of Moses and of the people  
You freed from Egypt,  
You are the One who is,  
who is present in human events,  
You are the God living and friendly,  
offering us liberation and 'future'.  
Please give us the gift of being able  
to go on a pilgrimage  
on the same paths of the Exodus.  
Please open our eyes and our hearts,  
so that we may welcome Your presence,  
that is mysterious, silent and real.  
May this journey make our faith stronger  
as well as the belief that what happened once  
may happen once again:  
You are always with us;  
You free us from all kinds of slavery and make us walk,*

*You make us grow and make us reach the destination  
which is known by You alone.*

*There we will contemplate You face to face  
and we will live with You for ever.*

*Amen.*

*(Angelo Casati)*

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

Let us listen to Jesus' invitation ("Follow me") with the 'ears' of our hearts. Let us make His voice resound in us, be amplified, so that He may show us the way for our minds, our strengths and our desires.

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

Let us share with the Sisters a part of our journey, that little path that the Word is showing us for today.