

Bewilderment and the Wrong Direction

The word in English that I think best describes what's going on with the two apostles as they're going away is bewildered. We don't use that word very much, but I think it kind of best sums up what's going on with them. They are bewildered.

The etymology of that word is kind of related to wilderness. It's like you're in a place where you're really settled—you're in the city—and then you find yourself out in the wilderness with no idea what you're doing. That's more or less what it means. And it actually captures very well what's happening today, because the two apostles are going the wrong way.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke, there's this theme the entire way that everything leads to Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the place where the Father's will is accomplished. It's a very strong motif in Luke. So you have to kind of read between the lines, but the point is that they're going the wrong direction. They are kind of cowardly leaving town, getting out of Dodge.

Sometimes we too are bewildered. Very often when we're bewildered, we feel out of sorts, unmoored, not at home, and we don't necessarily make the best decisions. That's kind of what is captured by their spiritual blindness. Whether the Lord inflicted it on them—it kind of sounds like it, the way their eyes were prevented—but it doesn't really matter. It still represents a spiritual blindness, and especially a blindness to Christ's presence, which is really the problem with being bewildered.

Though being bewildered is not necessarily a bad thing.

From Theory to the Power of the Gospel

I think the main problem with them in the Gospel today is that they're keeping it very theoretical. If our faith stays very theoretical, we'll never experience the power of the Gospel. Because our faith is not just an ethical system. Our faith is not merely the parables and teachings of Jesus. Our faith is about the grace and life of God alive in us.

If we keep it very theoretical—"Well, Jesus was a prophet. He was mighty. We thought He was going to do these things. The women went to the tomb and probably had this encounter," right?—if our faith remains theoretical, mostly up here, we'll never experience the power of the Gospel. That is what Peter is talking about in the Acts of the Apostles. He's not talking about theoretical stuff. He's talking about a man named Jesus, who lived, was crucified, died and was buried, rose again from the dead, and was witnessed by a lot of people: the eleven, in terms of the reading today, but also, as St. Paul says, over five hundred brothers at once saw Jesus risen from the dead before He went back to heaven.

It's about the power and grace and life of God. And Peter is talking on the day of Pentecost, by the way. The Holy Spirit has just been poured out. The apostles are speaking in tongues. People are hearing them in their own languages. They're about to see a lot of mighty deeds, which is kind of what he's talking about.

If it stays theoretical, we will be bewildered. Maybe things fit together and we can be somewhat calm, but we won't experience the Lord's presence and the power of the Gospel.

So I want to take this and apply it very briefly to places where we feel bewildered. Sometimes being bewildered is not necessarily a bad thing. It's not fun to be bewildered. Bewilderment can be grief. It can be failure. It can be an identity crisis, which people say most of us go through at least a couple of times throughout our lives. It could be a place of disappointment. It could be frustration even with our own sinfulness. There's a bewilderment in that. Things feel unsettled.

That's not necessarily a bad thing. Because very often—well, always—the Lord meets us in our bewilderment, as He met the apostles here. Always, He is there.

Scripture, Eucharist, and the Way Back

But sometimes the Lord is un-teaching us things so that He can teach us. Sometimes the Lord is un-teaching us things so He can truly instruct us.

How do we participate in that? Primarily, it is answered in the Gospel today. Jesus does two things. He interprets the Scriptures for them, which is a way of saying that they didn't know Scripture well enough, or they hadn't taken it seriously. And I can say that for myself at times, for sure. And He comes to them sacramentally.

I often tell people when they say they're feeling confused: the first thing you should do if you're feeling confused is go to Confession, because sometimes it's our fault that we're confused. And a lot of times, that clears it up.

But the sacrament that's mostly referred to in today's Gospel is the Eucharist. They see Him in the breaking of the bread. They recognize Him, and He vanishes. That is partially to get them to go back to Jerusalem: not to try to stay in the moment, but because it's time for them to go back the right direction, where they're going to find confirmation of the graces that are happening in the apostles. But it is also saying that we need to take the Eucharist more seriously.

So if you ever are feeling bewildered, two things: read Scripture on a daily basis—start with the New Testament—and engage the Eucharist with greater intensity. In that, you will

encounter the Lord. You will encounter, gradually usually, the power of the Gospel at a deeper level.

The Lord will often un-teach us something so that He can teach us the truth about things. And we know that when we press into the Lord in His loving mercy, we always find Him.

So dear friends, as we approach the Eucharist today, let's ask Him for that grace to help us press into Him and His love, so that we may experience the clarity that comes from the power of the Gospel. Praise be Jesus Christ.