

An Emmaus Walk

(Meditation While Walking)

By Brother Ramon SSF



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This pamphlet is suitable for parish use. It may be one component of a quiet day, retreat, Lenten exercise or as the conclusion to a study of the biblical story upon which it is based.

Emmaus Walk
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P/G-33-2006

Anglican Fellowship of Prayer Canada
Pamphlet P/G-33 (Rev. Apr. 2006)

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Brother Ramon SSF

The Emmaus Walk is an exercise in which prayer and scripture run together in a walking meditation. The specific goal of this exercise is for two believers to walk together in fellowship and in silence, allowing the risen Christ to minister within and between them. It begins in a group meeting, providing the context of silence, scripture and prayer, then breaks up into couples for the actual Emmaus Walk, and returns about an hour later to share the experiences of the walk, and to offer it to God in gratitude and praise.

I introduced this exercise for our Franciscan friars and sisters some years ago, and it has spread to churches, schools, prayer groups and retreatants with enthusiasm. It is simple, biblical, and has the virtue of providing both input and feedback.

On one memorable occasion I shared it with a young people's group at Tymawr convent. We put our names into a hat and I was paired with Luke, who was then eighteen years of age. On the silent return walk it became quite clear to me that the Lord had a specific word for him, and it unfolded itself as we walked quietly together. We had five minutes in hand, and sat on a wall, conscious of the Lord's presence and blessing. I did not communicate the 'word' to Luke during the later shared session, but wrote it out for him so that he could refer to it, and then we talked it through. It was a significant 'word for the future' which has since stood him in good stead in times of difficulty and conflict. He is now into the fifth year of ordination training, and he keeps in touch. We both remember our Emmaus Walk with great joy.

About the Author:

Brother Ramon SSF was an Anglican Franciscan friar, living as a hermit attached to a community in Worcestershire. He wrote widely, especially on the subject of prayer and spirituality.

If prayerful preparation has been undertaken, and the first experience doesn't altogether succeed, don't let that worry you. There is a novelty factor that has to be worked through, and temperamental differences to be allowed for. Persistence, and allowing for one another, are part of this exercise. One grows into shared silence, and what began as a novelty, or as an embarrassing non-verbal walk, can turn out to be a fruitful sharing of a love that transcends human friendship and participates in the divine Love.

Collect and Grace

Lord Jesus Christ: we thank you for your presence with us on our pilgrimage, for our time together and for all we have received from your hand. Enable us to carry your healing presence to our brothers and sisters, and ever to walk with you, until the day of your appearing, in the glory of the Father, and the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(Together)

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us evermore. Amen.

I shall now describe the exercise simply, and then include the original pattern, which has been used for the basis of the Emmaus Walk. One and a half or two hours are needed for the walk, including the time spent together before and after the exercise. The group meets together for the first section, breaking into pairs for the walk (pairing is best decided by names in a hat to enable a good mix), and all return to the central place at an agreed time to share experiences and conclude the session in prayer.

You can introduce your own variations – for instance, it may be thought best to begin together, do the walk, but then to arrange a separate evening to meet for the pooling of experiences, for there may be an enthusiastic outpouring! I shall outline it as for our own community, and then variations may be made according to the needs of a particular group.

Introduction

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32)

The group meets in a church or quiet place, and all the participants' names are put into a bowl. The leader selects and reads them out in pairs for the walk. After five minutes of settling into a relaxed silence, there is a prayer and reading as follows:

Invocation (The following, or an extempore prayer):

Lord Jesus Christ: Grant us now a sense of your loving presence, and by the light of your Holy Spirit open our minds to your love. As the hearts of the Emmaus walkers burned within them so long ago, so may your loving presence be the source of warmth and light to us as we walk

with you and reflect on your word. And to you be thanks and praise, in the glory of the Father and the unity of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Scripture (examples as follows):

Luke 24:13-35	Emmaus Walk
Matthew 4:1-11	Temptation
Matthew 4:18-25	Call and healing
Matthew 5:1-14	Jesus' teaching
Matthew 5:38-48	The way of love

Appropriate to Lent/Passiontide:

Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75	Peter's denial
John 21:15-19	Peter's restoration
Matthew 26:36-56	Gethsemane/arrest
Matthew 27:11-31	Trial and mocking
Matthew 27:32-56	Crucifixion

Some modern translations supply a table of parables and miracles of Jesus. Almost any such passage is suitable for meditative reading at this point.

Commentary on the reading, poetry, etc.

Five minutes of shared silence

The Walk

The outward walk should take half an hour, and the aim should be a prayerful sharing on the basis of the scripture/commentary read, with freedom to move into any other areas of common concern.

When the outward point has been reached, the pair should pause, turn, and retrace their steps together, but now in silence. (steady pace!) There should be an open awareness of one another and of the risen Christ's promised presence.

Conclusion

Return to the quiet place.

If desired, re-read the scripture or the second part of an agreed passage, (e.g. if Peter's denial has been read, then Peter's restoration can now be read).

There may be an open sharing of any experiences that any of the participants may have felt during the walk. Spend at least a further five minutes in silence, perhaps followed by a hymn or music.

The Emmaus Walk exercise is meant to provide a simple way of sharing with another, something of the experience that occurred on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35. In order to be silent with another, there needs to be a great measure of trust and openness. Only in a relationship of such loving trust can Christ manifest himself. When this happens, there is immense joy – and sometimes profound wonder.

But a warning note needs to be sounded. This walk must not be undertaken lightly without due preparation and prayer. Silence in solitude or shared with another can expose a person to the light and scrutiny of God, and the result could be either a sense of fear at being so exposed, or an experience of embarrassment and the inability to share or cope.