



The difficult process of forming the disciples.

How to be born again.

Luke 9:51-62

1. Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus, send your Spirit to help us to read the Scriptures with the same mind that you read them to the disciples on the way to Emmaus. In the light of the Word, written in the Bible, you helped them to discover the presence of God in the disturbing events of your sentence and death. Thus, the cross that seemed to be the end of all hope became for them the source of life and of resurrection.

Create in us silence so that we may listen to your voice in Creation and in the Scriptures, in events and in people, above all in the poor and suffering. May your word guide us so that we too, like the two disciples from Emmaus, may experience the force of your resurrection and witness to others that you are alive in our midst as source of fraternity, justice and peace. We ask this of you, Jesus, son of Mary, who revealed to us the Father and sent us your Spirit. Amen.

2. Gospel Reading

a) A key to the reading: The literary context

In the context of Luke's Gospel, the text for this Sunday is at the beginning of the new phase of Jesus' activity. The frequent conflicts with the people and the religious authorities (Lk 4:28; 5:21.30; 6:2.7; 7:19.23.33-34.39) confirmed Jesus as being the Servant Messiah as foreseen in Isaiah (Is 50: 4-9; 53:12) and as assumed by Jesus himself from the beginning of his apostolic activities (Lk 4:18). From now on, Jesus begins to proclaim his passion and death (Lk 9:22.43-44) and decides to go to Jerusalem (Lk 9:51). This change in the course of events created a crisis among the disciples (Mk 8:31-33). They cannot understand and are afraid (Lk 9:45), because they still hold on to the old way of thinking of a glorious Messiah. Luke describes various episodes touching on the old mentality of the disciples: the desire to be the greatest (Lk 9:46-48); the will to control the use of the name of Jesus (Lk 9:49-50); the violent reaction of James and John at the refusal of the Samaritans to welcome Jesus (Lk 9:51-55). Luke also points out how hard Jesus tries to get his disciples to understand the

new concept concerning his mission. This Sunday's text (Lk 9: 51-62) gives some examples of the way Jesus tried to form his disciples.

b) A division of the text to help with the reading:

Luke 9:51-52: Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem

Luke 9:52b53: A village in Samaria does not welcome him

Luke 9:54: The reaction of John and James at the Samaritans' refusal

Luke 9:55-56: Jesus' reaction to the violence of James and John

Luke 9:57-58: Jesus' first condition for following him

Luke 9:59-60: Jesus' second condition for following him

Luke 9:61-62: Jesus' third condition for following him

c) The text:

51 When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him; 53 but the people would not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. 54 And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But he turned and rebuked them. 56 And they went on to another village. 57 As they were going along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." 58 And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." 59 To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." 60 But he said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." 61 Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." 62 Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."

3. A moment of prayerful silence

so that the Word of God may penetrate and enlighten our life.

4. Some questions

to help us in our personal reflection.

a) Which part of the text pleased you most and which touched you most?

b) What defects and limitations of the disciples can we discover in the text?

c) What teaching method does Jesus use to correct these defects?

d) What facts from the Old Testament are recalled in this text?

e) With which of these three vocations (vv. 57-62) do you identify yourself? Why?

f) Which of the defects of Jesus' disciples is most prevalent in us, his disciples of today?

5. A key to the reading

that may help us to go deeper into the theme.

a) The historical context of our text:

The historical context of Luke's Gospel always contains the following two aspects; the context of the time of Jesus in the 30's in Palestine, and the context of the Christian communities of the 80's in Greece for whom Luke is writing his Gospel.

At the time of Jesus in Palestine. It was not easy for Jesus to form his disciples. It is not simply the fact of following Jesus and living in community that makes a person holy and perfect. The greatest difficulty comes from “the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod” (Mk 8:15), that is, from the time’s dominant ideology, promoted by the official religion (the Pharisees) and by the government (the Herodians). Fighting against the leaven was part of the formation he gave his disciples; especially that the manner of thinking of the great had taken deep root and always raised its head again in the minds of the little ones, the disciples. The text of our meditation this Sunday gives us an insight into the way Jesus faced this problem.

In Luke’s time, within the Greek communities. For Luke, it was important to help the Christians and not leave them prey to the “leaven” of the Roman empire and pagan religion. The same applies today. The “leaven” of the neo-liberal system, spread by the media, propagates a consumeristic mentality, contrary to Gospel values. It is not easy for people to realise that they are being duped: “What I have in my hand is nothing but a lie!” (Is 44:20).

b) A commentary on the text:

Luke 9:51-52a: Jesus decides to go to Jerusalem

“Now as the time drew near for him to be taken up to heaven”. This statement shows that Luke reads Jesus’ life in the light of the prophets. He wants to make it quite clear to his readers that Jesus is the Messiah in whom is accomplished that which the prophets foretold. The same manner of speaking is in John’s Gospel: “Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to pass from this world to the Father, ...” (Jn 13,1). Jesus is obedient to the Father, “he decisively set out towards Jerusalem”.

Luke 9:52b-53: A village in Samaria does not welcome him

Hospitality was one of the pillars of community life. It was difficult for anyone to let someone spend the night outside without welcoming him (Jn 18:1-5; 19:1-3; Gs 19; 15-21). But in Jesus’ time, the rivalry between Jews and Samaritans urged the people of Samaria not to welcome Jews who were on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and this led the Jews from Galilee not to pass through Samaria when they went to Jerusalem. They preferred to go through the valley of the Jordan. Jesus is contrary to this discrimination and, therefore, goes through Samaria. Consequently he suffers discrimination and is not made welcome.

Luke 9:54: The violent reaction of John and James at the refusal of the Samaritans

Inspired by the example of the prophet Elijah, James and John want to call down fire from heaven to exterminate that village! (2 Kings 1:10.12; 1 Kings 18:38). They think that by the simple fact that they are with Jesus, everyone should welcome them. They still cling to the old mentality, that of privileged persons. They think that they can keep God on their side to defend them.

Luke 9:55-56: Jesus’ reaction to the violence of James and John

“Jesus turned and rebuked them”. Some versions of the Bible, basing their translation on some old manuscripts wrote: “You know not what spirit dwells in you. The son of man did not come to take the life of men, but to save it”. The fact that someone is with Jesus does not give that person the right to think that he or she is superior to others or that

others owe them honour. The "Spirit" of Jesus demands the opposite: to forgive seventy times seven (Mt 18:22). Jesus chose to forgive the criminal who prayed to him on the cross (Lk 23:43).

Luke 9:57-58: The first condition for following Jesus

One says: "I will follow you wherever you go". Jesus' reply is very clear and without any hidden meaning. He leaves no room for doubt: the disciple who wishes to follow Jesus must impress this on his or her mind and heart: Jesus has nothing, not even a stone to lay his head on. The foxes and the birds are better off because they at least have holes and nests.

Luke 9:59-60: The second condition for following Jesus

Jesus says to one: "Follow me!" These were the words addressed to the first disciples: "Follow me" (Mk 1:17.20; 2:14). The reaction of the one called is positive. The person is ready to follow Jesus. He only asks that he may be allowed to bury his father. Jesus' reply is hard: "Leave the dead to bury their dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God". This is probably a popular proverb used for saying that one has to be radical in one's decision making. The one who is ready to follow Jesus must leave everything behind. It is as though one were dead to all one's possessions resurrected to another life.

Luca 9,61-62: The third condition for following Jesus

A third one says: "I will follow you, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home". Again the reply of Jesus is hard and radical: "Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God". Jesus is more demanding than the prophet Elijah when Elijah called Elisha to be his disciple (1 Kings 19:19-21). The New Testament is greater than the Old Testament in its demands on the practice of love.

c) A further deepening: Jesus the formator

The process of the formation of the disciples is demanding, slow and painful, because it is not easy to give birth to a new experience of God in them, a new vision of life and of the neighbour. It is like being born again! (Jn 3:5-9). The old mindset keeps creeping back in the life of people, of families and communities. Jesus spares no effort in forming his disciples. He gave much time to this, not always successfully. Judas betrayed him, Peter denied him and, in the moment of trial, all abandoned him. Only the women and John stayed close to him, near the cross. But the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sent to us after his resurrection, completed the work Jesus began (Jn 14:26; 16,13). Apart from what we have said concerning the text of this Sunday (Lk 9:51-62), Luke speaks of many other examples to show how Jesus went about forming his disciples and helping them to overcome the misleading mentality of the time:

In Luke 9:46-48 the disciples argue among themselves as to who is the greatest among them. The competitive mindset here is that of fighting for power, characteristic of the society of the Roman Empire, and it had already infiltrated the just-beginning and small community of Jesus! Jesus tells them to hold to the opposite way of thinking. He takes a child to his side and identifies himself with the child: "Anyone who welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who

sent me!" The disciples were arguing as to who was the greatest, and Jesus tells them to look at and welcome the smallest! This is the point most stressed by Jesus and the one to which he witnessed: "[I] did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mk 10:45).

In Luke 9:49-50, someone who was not part of the group of the disciples was using the name of Jesus to drive out devils. John saw him and stopped him: "Let us stop him because we do not know him". In the name of the community, John stops a good action! He thought he owned Jesus and wanted to stop anyone from using the name of Jesus to do good. He wanted a closed community. This was the old mentality of the "Chosen people, a separate people!" Jesus replies: "Do not forbid him, because anyone who is not against you is for you". The aim of formation cannot lead to a feeling of privilege and ownership, but must lead to an attitude of service. What is important for Jesus is not whether someone is part of the group or not, but whether the person is doing the good that should be done by the community.

Here are some more examples of the way Jesus educated his disciples. It was a way of giving human form to the experience he had of God the Father. You can complete the list:

- * he involves them in his mission and on their return he goes over what happened with them (Mk 6:7; Lk 9:1-2; 10:1-12, 17-20)
- * he corrects them when they go wrong (Lk 9:46-48; Mk 10:13-15)
- * he helps them discern (Mk 9:28-29)
- * he questions them when they are slow (Mk 4:13; 8:14-21)
- * he prepares them for the conflict (Mt 10:17ff)
- * he reflects with them concerning present problems (Lk 13:1-5)
- * he sends them to look at reality (Mk 8:27-29; Jn 4:35; Mt 16:1-3)
- * he confronts them with the needs of the people (Jn 6:5)
- * he teaches them that the needs of the people are above ritual prescriptions (Mt 12,7.12)
- * he defends them when they are criticised by their adversaries (Mk 2:19; 7:5-13)
- * he thinks of their rest and nourishment (Mk 6:31; Jn 21:9)
- * he spends time alone with them to teach them (Mk 4:34; 7:17; 9:30-31; 10:10; 13,3)
- * he insists on vigilance and teaches them to pray (Lk 11:1-13; Mt 6:5-15).

6. Psalm 19 (18), 8-14

The law of God source of formation

The precepts of the Lord are right,

rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure,

enlightening the eyes;

the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever;

the ordinances of the Lord are true,

and righteous altogether.

More to be desired are they than gold,

even much fine gold;

sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

Moreover by them is thy servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can discern his errors?
Clear thou me from hidden faults.
Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.
Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord,
my rock and my redeemer.

7. Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, we thank for the word that has enabled us to understand better the will of the Father. May your Spirit enlighten our actions and grant us the strength to practice that which your Word has revealed to us. May we, like Mary, your mother, not only listen to but also practise the Word. You who live and reign with the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen.