

VIA LUCIS: THE “WAY OF LIGHT”



We are all very familiar with the *Via Crucis* – the Way (or Stations) of the Cross which guides us through Lent. This meditation, the *Via Lucis* or Way of Light, is for Eastertide, and focusses on some “moments” of the Resurrection of the Lord. It is not a physical journey, like the Way of the Cross, but a journey of minds and hearts. There are eight “moments”, because eight is the number of the Resurrection: according to the Jewish reckoning of the days (which comes from the book of Genesis), Jesus died on the cross on the **sixth** day (the day of the creation of the first humans) and rested in the sleep of death on the **seventh** day – the Sabbath. His resurrection is therefore on the **eighth** day – Sunday – the first day of the New Covenant and the New Creation. The Easter symbolism of the number eight was very common in the early Church – it is for this reason, for example, that fonts and baptistries are octagonal – eight sided! While the Season of Easter goes all the way to Pentecost these meditations stop at the Ascension: this is so that people can observe the Pentecost Novena – nine days of prayer in memory of the prayer of Mary and the Apostles as they awaited the promised Spirit. These meditations can be used in whichever way is most useful to you. They follow the traditional pattern of the Way of the Cross, though which prayers you use are entirely optional.

Scripture passages are from the New Revised Standard Version (Catholic Edition)

Before and after each “moment” you may wish to use these prayers:

Before:

R. This is the Day the Lord has made, alleluia!

A: Let us rejoice and be glad, alleluia!

After:

O God, through Jesus your Son, you have conquered death; grant that we who joyfully recall His Resurrection may, through the renewal brought by your Spirit, rise up in the light of life. Amen.

Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be ...

1. The Resurrection of the Lord

(Matthew 28:1-7)



“After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as

snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’”

Consider how the Lord Jesus, after lying in the tomb in the sleep of death, was raised to life on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures, and left the sepulchre empty save for the cloths that had shrouded his body and face.

How impossible to describe a moment utterly unique in all history! Saint Matthew gives us a glimpse of what is impossible to imagine – the moment that the whole of creation is turned upside down by the return to life of God-with-Us who has died! And yet all we can do is imagine that moment when life returned to the body of Jesus, as he opens his eyes again, and takes that body – now glorified but still bearing the marks of the Passion – into his new mission.

2. He Appears to Mary Magdalene

(Mark 16:9-11)



“Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, from whom he had cast out seven demons. She went out and told those who had been with him, while they were mourning and weeping. But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.”

Consider how Mary Magdalene, filled with love and unutterable grief, visited the Lord’s tomb early on the Sunday, yet found her sorrow transformed into joy by meeting her Risen Lord.

The greater the love, the greater the pain: on that Sunday dawn Mary must have been inconsolable. And yet how much joy would have been poured into her heart in this meeting! Not even the doubts of the other disciples, who dismissed her testimony as “an idle tale,” could dampen her faith. She believed, and in her belief bore witness to the reality of the Resurrection. Let us seek, by our prayer and reflection, to be overwhelmed by the reality of Jesus’ life and presence with us.

3. Jesus Appears to the Disciples

(John 20:19-23)



“When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.’ When he had

said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’”

Consider how the disciples, having heard from Mary Magdalene and Simon Peter of the resurrection and the empty tomb, are locked in the house in fear; and yet Jesus appears alive in their midst, his glorified Body still bearing the marks of the cross.

It took time for the disciples to accept that Jesus, whom they had seen die on the Cross, whose body they had laid in the tomb, was truly alive again. In their troubled and confused state, the Lord’s message is a gently repeated “Peace be with you.” The risen Jesus seeks only to bring peace and hope and joy into the hearts of his people, especially when they are troubled or afraid. May that peace of the Risen Christ sustain us now and always!

4. The Journey to Emmaus

(Luke 24:13-35)



“Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. ... As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’”

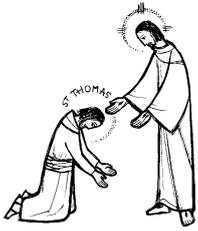
Consider how these two disciples, even though word of the resurrection had already reached Jerusalem, had given up, and were walking away from the Holy City with hearts downcast and sorrowful.

Jesus is always gentle with his followers, as he seeks to reveal the reality of his risen life to them. So with Cleopas and his companion, Jesus

appears to them and walks miles in their company, gently teaching them and opening their minds to the Word of God, until in the moment of Breaking of Bread they recognise him and come to new faith. May we who hear the Word and witness the Breaking of Bread also recognise the risen Jesus, as he gently teaches us and guides us in faith.

5. Thomas Doubts and Believes

(John 20:24-29)



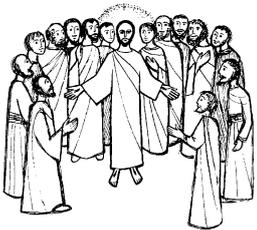
“But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, ‘We have seen the Lord.’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.’ A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’ Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’”

Consider how Saint Thomas, having to take on trust the word of his companions, refuses to believe until he sees for himself. And consider how the Risen Jesus, filled with love for Thomas even in his doubts, gently reassures him and leads him to faith.

We should not be quick to condemn Thomas for his doubts, since in the face of something like “rising from the dead”, doubt is an understandable human reaction! What is remarkable is the kindness of Jesus, who even as he gently upbraids Thomas for his lack of faith, also gives him the nourishment he needs for that faith to blossom. Blessed are we, who have not seen, and yet believe! Lord Jesus, help us in our doubt!

6. Jesus eats the Fish

(Luke 24:36-43)



“While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and

bones as you see that I have.’ And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, ‘Have you anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate in their presence.”

Consider how Jesus, appearing once more to his friends, wishes to prove that his resurrection is not purely spiritual, or a thing of imagination, but a real, physical rising: his wounded body can be touched, and he can eat and drink with them once more.

It is easier to believe in a “spiritual” resurrection than a physical one – and yet the Empty Tomb and these moments when Jesus appears to his disciples teach us that his resurrection was physical. In the Creed we profess our faith in the “resurrection of the body and the life of the world to come” – Jesus promises us a share in this physical resurrection, so that after our sleep in the grave (however long that may be) a day will come when we too will rise in the body, to eat and drink with the Lord Jesus after his resurrection.

7. Breakfast by the Lake

(John 22:4-14)



“Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, ‘Children, you have no fish, have you?’ They answered him, ‘No.’ He said to them, ‘Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.’ So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ... When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus

said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.”

Consider how the disciples, having returned to their old occupations on the lake, are once more startled by the appearance of the Risen Lord, who calls them to eat with him and breaks bread for them once more.

What a beautiful moment this is! And again, how gently does the Risen Lord lead his confused disciples to true faith in his resurrection! The words “Come and have breakfast” contain so much love, kindness, understanding and patience. This is the Lord who gives himself when we eat and drink in the Eucharist, who gently and patiently helps each one of us, his disciples, to find deeper and stronger faith.

8. Jesus Ascends into Heaven

(Matthew 28:16-20)



“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

Consider how the Lord Jesus, after having instructed his friends for forty days, was taken up into heaven in their sight, after promising to send the Spirit, and further pledging to remain with them always, and to come again in like manner.

As one journey ends, another begins: Jesus has given his friends all they will need (bar one final gift, the Holy Spirit) to be his Church. They will witness to all they have seen and heard, during his ministry with them, proclaiming the Kingdom of God and its ways. May we, who have received the word from those who have gone before us, trust in the Risen Lord’s promise to be with us. May we pray for the renewal of the Holy Spirit within us and the whole Church, so that we may once more proclaim his love to the ends of the earth!

Conclusion

(Acts 4:32-35)



“Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”

Let us pray.

God of everlasting mercy,
 who in the very recurrence of the paschal feast
 kindle the faith of the people you have made your own,
 increase, we pray, the grace you have bestowed,
 that all may grasp and rightly understand
 in what font they have been washed,
 by whose Spirit they have been reborn,
 by whose Blood they have been redeemed.
 Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
 who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
 one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.