

# Fr. John's Reflection: Uncovering Hope on the Emmaus Road

## Uncovering hope on the Emmaus Road

On account of the coronavirus, traffic on the Emmaus Road is very heavy. Cleopas and a friend (his wife?) walk the seven miles to Emmaus without recognizing Jesus walks along with them. (Luke 24:13-35) They recount their experience of Jesus' passion, death and apparent disappearance from his grave. Their haunting words echo today: "We were hoping."

As the pandemic unfolds, we have a lot of hopes dashed: opportunities to work in person with top faculty, be with great classmates, teammates and roommates. For some, cancellation of in-person Commencement disappoints. Summer plans may have become more fluid, let alone Fall Semester. We have a lot to say along the Emmaus Road.

To unpack the Gospel scene, artists often add characters to the account. The Clark Institute of Art's painting of the Meal at Emmaus includes the artist's wife. One of my favorite depictions of the meal, is Velazquez's. He focuses on the maid in his: "The Kitchen Maid at the Emmaus Meal" hanging in the National Gallery of Art in Dublin. Painted when eighteen, it is Velasquez's oldest surviving work.

Diego Velázquez (1599-1660), 'Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus', c.1617-1618. © National Gallery of Ireland.

## CREDIT

In Velasquez's painting, the maid is a daughter of a Spanish Christian and African Muslim. A slave. He places Jesus and the two disciples in the high left corner. Only in cleaning the painting in 1933, Jesus and the two disciples are uncovered.

While the men speak of spiritual matters, the maid cleans in the kitchen. She is clearly distracted, listening carefully over her right shoulder. Her stunned expression confirms her suspicion. She recognizes Jesus. While the two travelers walk 7 miles together and don't recognize Jesus, the maid recognizes whom she serves.

Velasquez, as young adult, takes a stand in the midst of raging contemporary debate: whether Spain, as a Christian country, has the right to enslave Africans. Velasquez paints an enslaved African has a soul and has ears to hear Christ's word. In fact, the maid hears the Word before Jesus' disciples.

Why? She is paying attention. Things are not the same; the world has changed. And, she knows it. Even if the two disciples don't know it. WHY? Because she is paying attention.

God takes us to a place that surprises us. A place that surpasses our expectations. The Emmaus Road takes the disciples to recognize the Risen Jesus over a meal. They retrace their steps "back to Jerusalem" as witnesses of hope.

Where this week, can we who have met the Risen Jesus on the Emmaus Road ourselves as individuals and as a community, give witness by offering hope to someone else? Where can we reach out safely to a senior citizen? A vulnerable person? A classmate? And offer a witness of hope?

Blessings, Fr. John

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