The Two Emmaus Communicators

**A BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE TWO EMMAUS DISCIPLES FROM A COMMUNICATIONS PERSPECTIVE**

Dear Friends!

In the Rector Major’s action programme for the Salesian Congregation after the 28th General Chapter, priority number three refers directly to communication:“living the Salesian sacrament of presence”. And specifically, inculturating the Salesian mission in the digital habitat.

It is a great challenge but also a great opportunity for all us communicators!

This request of the Salesian Congregation presents us with a demanding and important path ahead for a more profound and practical commitment of us all in the communications field. A starting point for carrying out this recommendation is to further explore our Salesian identity as communicators from a biblical perspective.

We need a biblical text and icon for Social Communication! We need a biblical ‘itinerary’ that helps us to reflect, pray, live and communicate from within our Salesian spiritual experience with the Word of God.

Many biblical texts make reference to communication! After discussing this with some of our Communication Delegates, the first text we have chosen is the story of Jesus’ encounter with the two disciples on their way to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35).

Starting from this biblical text, we would like to offer an interpretation and an application for communication today with the theme: **IMMERSION, HUMAN MEDIATION AND INTERCULTURALITY.**

This biblical text offers a rich and profound basis of human, cultural, spiritual and pastoral elements for a current and very Salesian contribution to dialogue with digital communication and networks in our present time.

For example, the Emmaus text offers a profound basis for how to communicate through dialogue, storytelling, symbols and rituals, for the importance of encounter, acceptance, listening, words, sharing, interactivity, mystery, affectivity, communication’s immersive setting, the social, political and religious environment around us, history, memory and so many other things we can apply to communication.

This text has been an enlightening source for our Salesian spirituality and an inspiring reference for the Church's Youth Ministry. The Synod on the Young, which took place in 2018, with the theme “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment“, chose the Emmaus text as the biblical basis for the entire Synodal document.

In this new approach to the Emmaus text, we have defined some themes to be developed and further explored.

* **THE IMMERSIVE SETTING OF JESUS‘ DIALOGUE WITH THE TWO DISCIPLES**

In this part we present the importance of understanding digital communication and social networks as an immersive setting of human and cultural rituals, from which emerges the need for human beings‘ interpersonal communication through telling their story; their need to express themselves freely, to be listened to and to dialogue with openness, trust and truth. The dialogue on the journey to Emmaus is an archetype of human communication: human beings, their freedom and creativity to tell their own story based on their experience and reality. We analyse in this part how the word, expressed in this open and trusting narrative, reveals the deep feelings of the person and becomes an affective code for communication. Through the narrated word the person reveals their inner habitat, feelings, desires, fears, hopes and dreams.

* **THE SUBJECTS OF COMMUNICATION ON THE EMMAUS JOURNEY**

In this second part we delve into human mediation as part of communication. Here we interpret how open dialogue opens individuals up to seeing, hearing, feeling, and interacting authentically in such a way that they feel whole in the dialogue, become the subject of communication, express their own inner being and open themselves to the new. Communication is significant when it fosters the expression of the communicator's inner condition. The awareness of being the subject of communication develops from the capacity to recognise the other as a person, the fundamental interlocutor of the relationship.

Human mediation expresses the social identity of each individual. The individual‘s relationship with technology and information takes place in an environment of respect for the dignity and place of the other in the communicative environment that is interconnected with all people and their community.

* **RITUAL AS A WAY OF COMMUNICATING**

In this third part we describe how narrative, storytelling, encourages the expression of an individual‘s subjective nature and opens a second door to communication: the sharing of deep experiences through the individual’s feelings, pains and deep hopes, ritualised through gestures and celebratory attitudes. Jesus brings about this moment of communication through the ritual of sharing bread, being together, shared gestures, feelings and affections. The place where this ritual of sharing bread is celebrated represents the home that welcomes with human warmth and trust, the habitat of fellowship, our common home. Communication generates relationships of trust as well as rituals. Friendship is an example of a human ritual that is constructed, experienced and celebrated. Care for human beings, for their health and quality of life and for integral ecology are all expressions of ethical communication.

* **THE EXPERIENCE OF MYSTERY AND BEAUTY IN HUMAN RELATIONSHIP**

In this fourth part, we describe aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication, the body expressing its language of pain and hope. The two disciples experience the word that touches the heart, the opening of themselves through the word and the gestures of the ritual of the sharing of bread. As their hearts burn in the ritual celebrated with Jesus, the two Emmaus communicators experience the mystery of God, the divine expressed in the ritual, the beauty of divine human love experienced with Jesus. Human communication touches the person‘s freedom and call to share responsibility before God, the other, all of creation. To communicate is to be a co-author with God in the ongoing project of the creation of the world. The communicator is the one who collaborates with the project of life and with the hope that was revealed by God in the Word made flesh who dwelt among us.( Jn 1:14).

* **THE EXPERIENCE THAT BECOMES COMMUNICATIVE RESPONSIBILITY**

In the fifth part we describe the return of the two disciples, communicators, to Jerusalem (Emmaus represents local communication, Jerusalem represents global communication). In this movement from the local to the global, we highlight the value of interculturality and groups in communication. The internet is an intercultural network. Social networks are places for the expression of the human and cultural rituals of groups, races, ethnic groups, representations of people with their cultures and organisations. Digital communication in social networks opens us up to new geographies for understanding intercultural realities, thus allowing dialogue between peoples and cultures based on identity and collaboration between communities.

* **THE DIGITAL CIRCUMSTANCE AND NEW YOUNG CHRISTIANS**

In the sixth part, and in the light of the experience of the two Emmaus communicators, we present the digital circumstance of today‘s young people, their view of the world, their languages and codes through music, dance, gestures, games, interactions and symbolic creations. Within this scenario of new languages, the way of the ritual of Word and Bread experienced by Jesus and the two Emmaus communicators can become a reference point for how to communicate from within our human situation and its culture. In this way, the biblical text becomes a true pedagogy for how to communicate at the interpersonal-group level in our cultural and networked human ecosystem. The biblical text also offers an immense and rich grammar of communication for the creation, production and broadcasting of information in its written, visual, audio and interactive formats. At the level of educative spirituality, the biblical text offers a wealth of spiritual and aesthetic material for how to experience the mystery of God in human reality. At the level of the community’s and group’s faith experience, the biblical text nourishes the message of communication that fosters the response to God’s call and the vocation of service on behalf of life and of the other, and that fosters missionary commitment and solidarity.

* **SOME QUESTIONS REGARDING COMMUNICATION TODAY**

From this reflection on the place of Word and Ritual in the Emmaus communication event, we present some questions for further study.

How can we experience the Word of God and communicate creatively from the inspiration and power of the Word? How can we promote story-telling as a way of listening and entering into the hearts of young people? How can we create the ritual of dialogue and prayer starting from the life experience of our young people? How can we experience the spirituality of communion, silence, union with Jesus in the virtual, instantaneous nature and speed of relationships in the digital world? How can we remain with Him in the absence-presence of virtual communication? How can the Word shared with young people become an experience of ritual, prayer and sacrament? How does the Eucharist unite us spiritually and educationally with our young people in the digital world? How can we promote the quality of communication in such a way that educators-communicators can surprise and delight young people so that they take up the cause of the Gospel, the Church and the Salesian Community? How do we communicate from interculturality in today's world?

Starting from sharing and reflection on this text and the subsequent questions, we propose three undertakings: the first is to promote study, reflection, sharing and personal and community prayer on the part of communicators, starting from the Word of God. The second is to discuss and explore the questions and others that may arise regarding the Emmaus text as applied to communication. The third, starting from the Emmaus text, is to be innovative and creative in developing and producing quality educational and formative material in many formats: video, music, posters, photos, games... for dissemination on websites and through social networks.

A poster of Jesus' meeting with the two Emmaus communicators is in the process of being produced by an Italian artist. This poster will be sent, together with the text that we are preparing, to all Communication Delegates and Teams, for use in formation meetings, prayers and for the creation of some communication material. I am asking Communication Delegates, if they can, to send me ideas and suggestions for enriching this text that we are working on.

With the collaboration and commitment of all our Communication Delegates and Teams we hope, together, to explore in greater depth the Congregation's recommendation that we “live the Salesian sacrament of presence” in the light of Salesian spirituality and our mission at the service of young people today.

 United in the hope of the Risen Christ!

 Mirandela, Portugal, 27 April 2021

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