

**Reflection on the Gospel-Third Sunday of Easter Year B
(Luke 24:35-48)**

-Veronica Lawson, RSM

Extraordinary things can happen if we open ourselves to the presence of a stranger on the road of life. That is one of the elements in today's gospel which is the conclusion to the Emmaus story. When I was a student in Dublin writing about Luke's depiction of women in his second volume, I would often take a detour on my way home to visit the National Gallery of Ireland. Velázquez' remarkable oil painting, *Kitchen Maid with the Supper at Emmaus* captured and held my attention. In his painting, the kitchen maid pauses from her tasks to listen, through the window between kitchen and dining area, to the conversation between Jesus and the disciples. The disciples have not yet recognised the companion they had encountered on the road from Jerusalem. Velázquez seems to be suggesting that the young slave woman has sensed what they have still to discover.

Imagine two dejected disciples (Cleopas and possibly his wife) on the road from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. On their journey, they encounter the risen Jesus. At first, they fail to recognise him. Their sadness at his death has blinded them to what is happening before their very eyes. He engages them in conversation and holds up a metaphorical mirror to their experience of loss and grief. Their hearts "burn" within them as he opens to them the meaning of their sacred scriptures. They invite him to share a meal with them and their eyes are opened: they recognise him in the breaking of the bread. He disappears from their midst. They cannot contain the joy they have experienced in realising that Jesus is alive.

Cleopas and partner go straight back to Jerusalem to share the good news with the other disciples. All the assembled disciples now experience powerfully the presence of Jesus in their midst. They share a meal with him. He opens their minds to understand the scriptures. Everything falls into place. They not only understand Jesus' death and resurrection in the light of the scriptures. They now know that they will be "clothed with power from on high" to exercise their role as witnesses to this great mystery, and to preach forgiveness to all peoples "beginning from Jerusalem".

Luke will open the Acts of the Apostles with the story of Jesus sending the disciples to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. We who re-member these events in every Eucharistic celebration are both the recipients and the bearers of that message. If we allow our hearts to "burn" within us, we too may recognise the Risen One in our gatherings and become "witnesses to the ends of the earth". A new consciousness of what is happening to our planet might permit us to extend our witness beyond the human to the whole Earth community.