Lenten 2017 Series – Encounter Lent (#encounterlent)

Session 1 – Called to a Loving Encounter with Jesus and the Church

Objectives:

* Share experiences of encounter with Jesus
* Deepen understanding of our baptismal call
* Prepare to give priority to those who need it most

Symbol(s) of the session (optional):

* Blindfold

Song for Prayer:

* Suggested song(s): *Eye Has Not Seen* or *Be Thou My Vision*

Introduction:

* Welcome to the first session of our Lenten Series *Encounter Lent*.
* During these five weeks we will make our journey with Jesus, following the various moments of the Emmaus passage. As part of this series, each closing prayer ends with a commissioning to prepare you to reach out to those who most need to hear the good news of Jesus and feel the loving embrace of the Church.
* Our first session today will focus on how Jesus reaches out to the disciples, taking the first step in coming forth to meet them.

Sacred Scripture:

A Reading from the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke (Luke 24:13-16)

*“Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles**from Jerusalem called Emmaus,**and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred.* *And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented from recognizing him.”*

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Reflection:

In the biblical passage of the disciples on their way to Emmaus, Jesus comes forth to meet these two disciples who are returning from Jerusalem filled with fear, anxiety, and frustration. Jesus actively looks at the reality affecting his disciples and inserts himself in it. Jesus knows all his disciples have been traumatized by the death of their teacher, friend, and Lord. His death deeply disturbed them and filled them with fear. Their master had been arrested, tried, and found guilty of a crime deserving the death penalty, according to the laws of the time. The passage indicates that these two disciples remained three days in Jerusalem after the death of Jesus before deciding to leave town. It is possible that, during those days, they were in hiding out of fear of being recognized as disciples of the executed one, as Peter feared when three times he painfully denied knowing and even being a disciples of Jesus. They finally decide to leave the city, to get far away from that place of death, and return to their lives, to what they were doing before following Jesus.

The first action Jesus takes in this passage is to join the disciples in their walk. With this action, Jesus takes the first step. He gives priority to the disciples by reaching out to them and coming forth to meet them. Jesus approaches them with deep respect in order to listen to what they are saying, grasp their feelings, and perceive their reaction to the events. He reaches out to them, and listens to them, knowing their thoughts and feelings, and how much they have endured.

The biblical narrative indicates that the disciples did not recognize the stranger who joined them along the way because *something prevented their eyes from recognizing him (Luke 24:16)*. We do not know how close to the disciples Jesus was walking, or for how long. What we do know is that Jesus is listening to what they say, and he recognizes their gestures of discouragement and sadness. This action of anonymous accompaniment shows great respect to the mourning the disciples are experiencing due to the death of such a beloved person in whom they had placed all their hopes. Deep in their sorrows, the disciples also face the harsh temptation that they may have wasted their time by following someone who turned out not to be who they thought he was. It is very likely that it was precisely this pain and confusion that prevented them from recognizing Jesus.

**SEE**

* Have you felt a time in your life when Jesus took the initiative to reach out to you? If yes, please share that experience with the group. If no, what blindfolds prevented you from recognizing Jesus’ presence in significant moments in your life?
* In the story, Jesus joins the two already on a journey. From what we can tell, the two were open for someone else to join them. When did you last feel invited or welcomed? When did you last demonstrate hospitality for another? Why is hospitality essential for conversion of heart to occur in someone’s life?
* Jesus’ action of walking with the two disciples is labeled *accompaniment.* Jesus’ physical accompaniment gave way to spiritual accompaniment. How have you felt Jesus’ spiritual accompaniment in your life? How has your physical accompaniment with others been an opportunity for Jesus’ spiritual accompaniment to work through you?

**JUDGE**

God seeks us out first through the sacrament of Baptism and calls us to be missionary disciples of God’s love.

God is the Lord of History. We are called to God’s own life, and through the waters of Baptism we rose with Christ to a new life as sons and daughters of God.

Such splendid dignity makes us kings—children of a King; priests—participating in the priesthood of Christ and prophets—proclaimers and messengers of the Word of God in the world. Thus, our Baptism is an urgent call to participate in the life and mission of God. Pope Francis reminds us that, by virtue of our Baptism each member of the people of God becomes a missionary disciple (*Evangelii Gaudium, #120)*. In turn, the bishops of Latin America emphasize the urgency of a missionary discipleship *so that these peoples continue to grow and mature in their faith in order to be the light of the world and witness to Jesus Christ with their own lives* (*Aparecida Document, #16*).

Jesus invites all baptized to seek others out first and gives us the Holy Spirit to guide our joyful steps. In the apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis tells us that reaching out first means taking the initiative without fear: to greet, to forgive, to listen, to show mercy, because God loves us first. This demands reaching out to others; invite the excluded, offer mercy, and experience the joy of being a blessing to others. This missionary image of reaching out first calls to mind the prayer of Saint Teresa of Avila:

*God has no body on this earth but yours*

*No hands but yours*

*No feet but yours*

*Yours are the eyes with which he looks on the world with compassion*

*Yours the feet with which he walks doing good*

*Yours the hands he now has to bless us.*

**ACT**

What is the first best step to offer your hands, feet, eyes and ears God to be His presence in this world?

* What are the places where Jesus sends us today? Please share your experiences.
* Who are the people we need to reach out to urgently? Please share your experiences.
* What attitudes, gestures, and actions can help us encounter one another in daily life at work, school, our neighborhood, public transportation, the supermarket, our faith community? Please share your experiences.

**CELEBRATE**

* Suggested song: one of the two that you did not use above or another song of your choice

**Leader:**

Loving Lord, you have taken the first step and reached out to us. You have sought us out in so many ways, through so many events and people in our lives. Sometimes we have covered our eyes with blindfolds of our own making and have failed to see you. But, gently and lovingly, you have walked near us at all times. Allow us now to see and to have the courage to remove the blindfolds from our eyes so that we might see you in our daily life, in our pains and in our joys, in life around us, in our sisters and brothers, in the thirst for you that those around us experience. Lead us to recognize that your eyes, your feet, and your hands in this world are our eyes, our feet, and our hands stretched out for others. Others are waiting for us. Send us!

**All:**

* Take away, Lord, the blindness of our self-centeredness, which prevents us from seeing you.
* Take away Lord, the blindfold of our worries about the future, which fills us with fear and prevents us from reaching out to others.
* Take away, Lord, the blindfold of indifference, which prevents us from seeing the need to get out of our comfort zones.
* Take away, Lord, the blindfold of our pain and disappointment, which prevents us from seeing you walking with us.
* Take away, Lord, the blindfold of our obsession with possessions and control, which prevents us from seeing that we depend on you alone and that you are our light and all we need.
* Take away, Lord, the blindfold of our doubt that prevents us from seeing you Risen, in all the life around us.

**Sacred Scripture:**

*After this the Lord appointed seventy-[two] others whom he sent ahead of him in pairs to every town and place he intended to visit.* *He said to them, “The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few; so ask the master of the harvest to send out laborers for his harvest.* *Go on your way…**The seventy-[two] returned rejoicing. (Luke 10:1-3, 17a)*

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**Leader:**

Now let us think of that person whom we need to reach out to. Let us write her or his name on a piece of paper. Let us all pray for her or him.

**All:**

Lord, here are the people you love as your children, and who are in pain, thirsting for you. You send us to them, even as they are weak as we are. The harvest is rich. There are many good people out there, people just longing to recognize themselves as your chosen ones, your possessions. Lead us to them, Lord, and come with us on this journey.

**Leader:**

Lord Jesus, you accompany us in all our journeys, make us now aware that we are your good news, your gospel for others. You send us forth, yet you come to us. Thank you, good and gracious Lord.

In the name of + the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

**MISSION:**

This week commit yourself to go out; either reach out to someone or to the peripheries.

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| **Reach out to someone** | **Reach out to the periphery (in pairs)** |
| 1 – Look for the best time to meet the person you have chosen to reach out to this week | 1 – Choose a place to go to actively observe that particular reality (for example, public transportation, an inner city park, a hospital waiting room, etc.) |
| 2 – Ask simple questions showing interest in the person. Do not start out by giving advice, talking about doctrine, but by listening intently. You want to join them on their journey and become attuned to their lives. | 2 – Find a place where you can observe without disturbing or annoying others |
| 3 – Create a safe place where the person feels confident expressing herself or himself without fear of being judged. | 3 – Use all your senses to perceive the reality of the place: the persons who are present, their ages, what they do, how they relate to one another, what type of place it is and how it is taken care of; notice if there are any authorities present, what moods people seem to have, how they are dressed, what type of music they listen to, in what language they communicate, what conversations you hear, what they talk about, what is in the air. |
| 4 – Provide hope or light. Share examples from your own experience. | 4 – Upon returning home, share with your missionary partner:   * What you observed, heard, perceived * What you felt and thought while you were actively observing reality * What new things you learned from this experience * How does it prepare you to interact with others in a second visit to this place? |
| 5 – If the person has expressed a need for some concrete help, try to find contacts or resources that will be useful. |  |
| 6 – It might be good to extend an invitation to a parish event or some celebration in order to get to know the person better. |  |
| 7 – Make sure to stay in touch. |  |

(Reflections, prayer services and mission plans used by permission from the 5th Encuentro Guide

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