

THE EMMAUS SERIES

13th Sunday Year C

1 Kings 19: 16, 19-21

Galatians 5: 1, 13-18

Luke 9: 51-63

Jesus resolutely took the road for Jerusalem

Where is my life leading? A question many people ask themselves today – as the things that really matter are lost sight of in a haze of materialism and hedonism. We read in the weekend papers of people seeking to give their lives a new direction, because wealth and acclaim have left them with a sense of emptiness. If this spiritual emptiness is more widespread in today's world, the problem is not new. St Paul's advice for the Galatians, in our second reading - describing the 'self-indulgence' of the times as a kind of bondage - is as meaningful today as when it was first written.

It is our fundamental decisions that give direction to our lives. In today's gospel reading from Luke, Jesus begins to instruct his disciples, preparing them for the decisions that lie ahead of them. The example of Jesus, in the direction he gives to his life, is clearly affirmed - 'the time draws near for him to be taken up', and 'Jesus resolutely took the road for Jerusalem'. He shared our life to the full; he too had to make the painful human decisions that gave direction to his life. In these decisions, he was 'resolute', faithful to the end in expressing the generous ways of his Father. Our lives are shaped by the basic decisions we have made - concerning family priorities, concerning our professional responsibilities, concerning our attitudes as neighbours and citizens. As this gospel reading takes us into the company of Jesus, let us ask ourselves how responsible we are in the making of these life decisions, and how resolute we are in putting them into practice.

Luke presses home the lesson, recalling, at this point, three surprising responses made by Jesus to those who sought to become his followers. Jesus used words to great effect. The crowds followed him to hear his words of wisdom and encouragement. Many of his off-the-cuff sayings have become proverbial. But the prophet from Nazareth was not the ordinary kind of storyteller, he overturned people's expectations. In the usual way of things, a good story reconciles us, in the end, to the wholesomeness that is inherent to our human affairs; and proverbs sound a note that reassures us that there is a predictable order in things. The parables of Jesus, however, invite us to leave behind the reassurances of our familiar world, and to enter into the new order of things he called the 'Kingdom' of his Father – where the last may be first, and the one who shows himself to be our true friend may be a traditional enemy. Similarly, the three responses in today's gospel, though they are like proverbs, are meant to bring a shock that confronts us with the radical nature of our decision to be a follower of Jesus. They should be taken in this spirit, rather than as literal prescriptions. There may be a little ironical humour implied, also – for instance, if the father who is to be buried is still hale and hearty.

Those who take seriously the invitation to follow Jesus, with all its radical implications, will never regret their decision – as the history of the Church as proved age after age.

John Thornhill sm