

Easter Retreat ; Ampleforth

5-8 April 2007

“..perhaps the Church’s best kept secret...” [painting by numbers]  
“the Supper at Emmaus..” Caravaggio

issues discovered at Good Friday session 6 April 2007 0945am

- the identity & role of the third person [no 3]

not a waiter..better dressed  
why is he there?  
interesting headdress  
stance relaxed..interested  
receptive  
shirt same colour as Christs  
does his headgear tell us anything?  
why is his sleeve rolled up?  
not excited  
does he not know what is going on?

could he be a Roman?  
clean shaven short hair  
represents Caravaggios doubts?  
listening..frowning  
resentful?  
focused entirely on Christ  
Caravaggios patron  
expectation..wonderment  
represents those who don’t know & are questioning  
lot of light round his head

identity..food/bread..no cups or plates  
“he is incomplete” = insufficiency  
someone who is going to tell the story  
searching the face of Christ  
something entirely otherwise  
outside the group  
waiter  
a sense looking at Jesus “whats so special about this man?”  
= a bit jealous

..a journalist?  
he may become a disciple  
“he is important spiritually..”  
casting shadow over Jesus  
hand tucked into his belt

- the identity & role of the third person [no 3]

is third man a waiter?  
could he be the innkeeper?  
is it us looking on?  
face of Christ young untouched  
    ..he has no beard  
the two look spellbound  
landlord not showing recognition..spellbound

has he had any prior involvement in story so far?  
why is his right sleeve rolled up?  
a doubtful Thomas?  
not in shadow  
lace collar..better off..other two shabby  
looks cross with Jesus  
thumb in his belt suggests he owns the place  
he stands..others sit  
is it Caravaggio himself?  
caring..  
version of Jewish prayer cap on head?  
completely transfixed  
worrying what all fuss about..will he get paid?  
he is looking at Christ

his shadow "frames" Jesus  
predominance of his ear  
a quizzical outsider..on one side  
    ..slightly outside frame of reference but being drawn in  
shaved head..not a Jew?  
perplexed image..doesn't understand what Christ is doing  
what sort of waiter is he?  
in awe..listening..knows what is happening  
is he a Jew?  
compassion on his face  
sleeve rolled up  
light hits him & Christ

"I must listen to this man.."

“I have neither silver nor gold, but I will give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk”

a beautiful story of new life in Easter Week..a cripple from birth cured, to walk for the first time..

a crucial factor in miracle was the initial crucial intervention..”a man being carried past.. they used to put him down every day near the Beautiful Gate”

“they” it is as close as we get to them..anonymous stretcher bearers..every day..what faith, stronger faith than cripple, to go each day & carry him hopefully prayerfully.. ..& it is you Sisters..

..how many of us crippled physically spiritually emotionally relationally, do you carry in thought love & prayer to this beautiful gate behind me..into Blessed Sacrament Chapel & into your hearts?..

..some 70yrs ago now a London Transport bus driver & his wife had a baby boy..born in hospital with severe disabilities & doctors explained he had hours to live..they took him home to nurse him for last few hours of his life..mother said to husband “come, we are taking him to the Sisters” took baby to Poor Clare monastery in Notting Hill close to their home..knocked at door & extern Sister met them..they explained baby’s terminal condition..she took them into the Church & at the grill, they handed him over to her & she took him up onto the sanctuary & to the altar, & in front of Blessed Sacrament, she laid him as if in a manger..according to the Sister he smiled..& bus driver said to me when I met him 35yrs ago now “Father, do you know where he is now?” & pointed to tall young man standing next to him..his son..“all down to the Sisters Fr Bede” ..indeed..then & now..

“..look at us..”

; Lord have mercy

“..I [we] will give you what I [we] have..”

; Christ have mercy

“..they were unable to explain what had happened..”

; Lord have mercy

May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins & bring us to everlasting life.  
Amen.

..a heavy walk home to Emmaus..leaden footed in despair & despondency..for all they had come to believe in him & his radical message, his miracles & rode on wave of evangelisation, it was finished..he & their ministry was dead & buried..walking home to face scorn & derision of those who’d warned them 3yrs earlier not to be so foolish to leave everything & follow just another mendicant wonder-worker..& now humble pie & a return to farming or fishing..42yrs in religious life & now taking a bus home to Leeds.. & at lowest ebb then, & with us now Sisters, so often a stranger of a member of our community falls into step & conversation with us..& mood like tide changes for the better ..blue sea & blue sky thinking..that view of yours 45miles due south from here optimises the future, the long view, & ever accompanied as he talks to us on the road..it reinforces our need of wise senpectae in our communities as they caringly listen, calm waves, &

bravely scold us for our selectivism in community “so slow to believe the full message of the prophets” of the gospel, the Rule & our Customary..

He has walked in step with you from Ampleforth & into Wass..& by the Stapylton Arms he makes as if to turn left towards Byland, & crucially you “press him to stay” & walk here with you..he never presumes his place as a companion ..he waits for you & I to invite him..& to continue each morning..

Caravaggio’s “Supper at Emmaus” is full of the joy & anticipation of Easter..food is almost a distraction..crucial ingredients are the threesome & Jesus..three chairs round meal table; Jesus faces us..Cleopas to our right, younger disciple at most awkward place at any table, the corner to our left..& as Jesus blesses bread, young disciples expression is one of incredulity as he grips arm of his chair as if to hold on to reality..almost bursting out of his jacket with passion & energy to get closer..Cleopas, his arms spread out wide, seeing what we can’t see from our place in Choir..direct sightline into palm of Jesus’ hand of blessing, & he sees hole of nail..he takes up stance of Crucifixion “can you drink the cup I must drink?” & James & John said eagerly in search of best seats “yes we can!” ..if only..

& lastly the stranger/incomer/migrant standing to Jesus’ right next to table..in his book “Painting the Word” John Drury, Dean of Christ Church Oxford, gives him two words “the servant” if only he knew him..he is a rabbi..his Jewish prayer cap, sleeve of his garment rolled up above elbow, ready for ritual washing before a meal..holding on to his belt, to all he knows religiously of scripture in this moment of enticement..or invitation?.. into the real presence of the Eucharist..his shadow projects onto back wall behind Christ as if to show emergence of Christ & Christianity from its Jewish roots & tradition “so slow to believe the full message of the prophets”..

& as with all best gospel stories it is left with a gap/space for an ext chapter for you to look pray imagine & write in..I suggest it is immediately after “Jesus had disappeared from their sight” then there are three chairs at table..two occupied one vacant & still warm, with rabbi standing & watching..divine food for three..& what do you think happens next?

In UK April 2023 there is plenty of food & seats in our lives of common unity..& is there a place for a migrant who arrived on a beach in Dover earlier this morning? or do our Border Force on our behalf hold them briefly before deporting them to Rwanda, where our Home Secretary has already bought off the government there with 30 pieces of silver ..a story she tells in House of Commons without hesitation nor seemingly a wobble of her conscience..

& pray Sisters, what is true identity of the migrant on beach in Dover this morning?..is it not the Risen Christ? inviting us to a meal of grilled fish..& how they/we had recognised him at the breaking of bread in his lifejacket & his radical difference..

& will we allow him to disappear from our sight, to walk onto a plane to Rwanda or onto a holding barge off the south coast?..will we?..

“yes, it is true, the Lord has risen” & appears to us daily, & often daily, in community..

“I have neither silver nor gold, but I give you what I have..” the gift of the pure nard of life in this community..

[ Easter Wednesday Lk 24:13-35 ]

Strong, sheltering God,  
we bless you for all the beautiful things of home;  
warmth & shelter when the wind outside is bitter,  
food for body & soul,  
treasured gifts & treasured memories,  
stability, acceptance, care.  
We bless you for the chance to be ourselves,  
for the tasks that weave the pattern of our days,  
for the sweet, familiar sounds of the ordinary..

Have mercy on us,  
God of friend & stranger.  
disturb our complacency,  
shake our circles of contentment  
sweep through our hearts  
& our houses,  
with the new broom of your Spirit,  
until love is our only refuge.  
We make this prayer through Christ our Lord.Amen.

..on our hearts & homes..  
..in our coming & going..  
..in our life & believing..

..the blessing of God  
..the peace of God  
..the love of God

..at our end & new beginning

..the arms of God to welcome us  
& bring us home. Amen.