

Eucharist is food for the journey to Jerusalem

Spiritually, we are constantly going and coming from Jerusalem.

Jerusalem has always been considered a sacred place, a holy city chosen by God for his throne, his dwelling place among his people, the center point from which salvation radiates. Its Temple was considered extraordinarily sacred, a place of attachment and spiritual identity for every Jew.

Jesus went there many times. As a child, he was presented to the Lord in the Temple, and it was there that Simeon told Mary her heart would be pierced as though by a sword. Each year Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem for Passover, and Jesus accompanied them.

When he was 12, on the journey home his parents discovered with horror that he was not with them. They later found him back in the Temple — he called it his “Father’s house” — discussing religious matters with the teachers.

During Jesus’ 40 days in the desert, Satan led him to the parapet of the Temple and tempted him to display his divinity by jumping off so angels would catch him, but Jesus would have none of it. “You should not put the Lord, your God, to the test,” he told the devil.

Determination, tension

In Luke and the Acts of the Apostles, Jerusalem is the point toward which Jesus is constantly moving and the hub from which the preaching of the Gospel goes out to the world. Luke reaches a critical climax in Chapter 9 when Jesus determines to go to Jerusalem: “When the days for his being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined

to journey to Jerusalem” (Lk 9:51). The chapters that follow are marked by the determination and tension that met Jesus’ courageous decision.

Many thought he should not go. Some of his disciples were frightened for him and not a little for themselves. He continued to teach and heal along the way, heightening the antipathy some felt for him and affirming his insight that something definitive would happen there. Some of the Pharisees warned him to go away because Herod wanted to kill him, but Jesus replied, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and I perform healings today and tomorrow, and on the third day I accomplish my purpose. Yet I must continue on my way today, tomorrow, and the following day, for it is impossible that a prophet should die outside of Jerusalem’” (Lk 13:32–33).

Moved by the ache in his heart for the holy city that had rejected him, he added, “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were unwilling!” (Lk 13:34).

Disappointed, disillusioned

Jesus loved Jerusalem and her people, and it distressed him that many were rejecting him. He continued his journey nonetheless, a final journey to his death. After his death, some of his disciples left Jerusalem. Disappointed and disillusioned, hopelessly licking their wounds, they headed back to their former lives.

Chapter 24 of Luke recounts the

beautiful story of two disciples who encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus — the road away from Jerusalem — and how he asked where they were going and what had happened to make them so sad. They did not recognize him, but he explained the Scriptures and blessed and broke bread with them, just as he had done at the Last Supper. Their eyes were opened, and they returned to Jerusalem full of hope in the risen Lord.

Spiritually, we are constantly going and coming from Jerusalem.

There is a learning curve to discipleship, and we alternate between fervor and sluggishness, conviction and doubt, hope and hesitation. One day we are zealously determined to make the journey to Jerusalem with Jesus no matter the cost — to take up our cross and suffer with him, to stand up for the faith and live only for him. The next day when something unnerving happens, we hesitate and head in the opposite direction, away from the cross and toward Emmaus.

But Jesus catches up with us, too, not at all surprised that fear of the cross has gotten the best of us.

Back on the road

“What are you thinking as you walk away?” he gently questions. If we pour out our hearts to him in prayer and listen to his word, he opens our eyes and gives us strength for the return trip.

And he feeds us. In every sense, the Eucharist is food for the journey, as Luke’s account of the meeting on the road to Emmaus unmistakably illustrates. Wherever we find ourselves spiritually — walking toward or away from Jerusalem — we need the nourishment of the Lord’s body and blood.



ARCHBISHOP
J. PETER
SARTAIN



Luke recounts the beautiful story of two disciples who encountered Jesus on the road to Emmaus — the road away from Jerusalem.

The Eucharist keeps us strong for our journey to Jerusalem because it is a participation in Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and a share in the grace that continues to flow from it: Calvary was the temple of the eternal sacrifice. When we take part in the Eucharist and receive the Lord’s body and blood, we are in the heart of Jerusalem, embraced by its deepest spiritual significance.

Discipleship’s learning curve can be sharp, and we may vacillate many times on the road. But there is never a good reason to give up. We, too, must continue on our way “today, tomorrow, and the following day.”

May Easter strengthen our hope in Christ, who follows us when we walk away, listens to our protests and our fears, and feeds us with food that puts us right back where we need to be.

DO YOU HAVE AN INTENTION FOR ARCHBISHOP SARTAIN’S PRAYER LIST?

You may send it to him at Archbishop Sartain’s Prayer List, Archdiocese of Seattle, 710 Ninth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104.