

“He came to a village...” (Lk. 10: 38)

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Abstract:

St. Luke's Evangelist records several contexts in which we can identify hospitality, as a bridge between people of similar or different social categories.

Developing the hospitality from the two sisters' house (Lk. 10, 38-40), in antinomy with Emmaus' dinner (Lk. 24: 13-36), in this study the role of the host receiving the guest as well as that of the guest who becomes the host is appreciated. Both events are placed by St. Luke in the countryside, during two trips. The Eucharistic Supper of Emmaus is preceded by the Scripture journey in search of Christ. The Emmaus Host becomes unseen by the eyes of Cleopas and the other disciple, but lights the hearts by understanding Scripture and consuming the bread-Christ.

In the Gospel of St. Luke the rejection of Jesus by the village (εἰς κώμην) of the Samaritans, when He was on his way to Jerusalem (Lk. 9: 52) is considered an inhospitality exception. In this context, the Samaritans would have been in the position of hosts.

Keywords: *Luke Gospel, village, hospitality, Martha and Mary, Emmaus*

1. Introduction

For the Evangelists the distinction between village, borough and town is not extremely important, because Christ the Traveler has a redeeming message for man in general.

The Gospel according to Luke, on which we will focus for this study, emphasizes the love with which the Lord is surrounded, as well as the abundant mercy that He pours over villages and towns. By focusing this study on the reception of the Christic message from Lk. 10: 38-40 and Lk. 24: 13-36 we want to underline the correct relationship between hosts and Guest, but also the exception when the Guest becomes guide and host.

Saint Evangelist Luke mentions several contexts in which we can identify hospitality as a connection between persons who belong to similar or different social categories. To this respect we mention fragments such as: the feast offered by Levi, the tax collector called by Jesus to become one of the Saint Apostles who would later on become Saint Matthew the Evangelist (Lk. 5: 27-29); Christ's acceptance and entrance in the house of one of the Pharisees to eat together with His disciples, when we are presented the moment when Christ's legs are washed by the sinful woman (Lk. 7: 36-50) or the moment when Christ is received by Martha and Mary in the house of Lazarus, their brother (Lk. 10: 38-40). In the Gospel according to Luke we do not find contexts of manifestation of hospitality between Jewish and foreigners, gentiles. By extension we can consider relevant the fragment in which we find out about Jesus being rejected by a village of Samaritans (εἰς κόμην), while He was heading to Jerusalem (Lk. 9: 52). In this context, the Samaritans would have found themselves in the posture of hosts.

2. To be a host

A simple invitation to lunch assumes the merit of being an authentic gesture of love. To have lunch does not refer simply to the physical act of sitting together at the same table, but it signifies that there is a union between the participants, a sharing not only of food, but of common feelings and interests; it demonstrates on the one hand the generosity of the one who invites and prepares for this moment, and on the other hand, the willingness and openness of the soul of the one who accepts the invitation. A mutual exchange of understanding and dedication. It often happens that precisely during the moments of intercommunity social relations establish together with a lively confidentiality between the messmates. They feel close to one another, completely at ease, willing to reveal their inner feelings, torments and joy that go through their lives. At this level, the common lunch goes beyond the relations that seem to be purely physical, of kinship or social, to establish more intense and expressive relations.

New exigencies and friendships are born. Nevertheless, Jesus' discourse is not delimited to this phase, which is in itself significant and valid. It reaches a more elevated and spiritually tormenting level: to invite

someone to lunch in your own house involves the whole heart so that it is the sign and effect of love exclusively, which pours especially onto those who need it the most and who are the farthest, in order to share the same food with them as if they were familiar and the most intimate of friends. When someone prepares lunch or dinner, the persons one would wish for at the table are the friends.

Luke mentions the two daily meals of the Jewish: *ἀριστον* is the meal at midday and it is the equivalent of breakfast; *δειπνον* is the main meal of the day served almost in the evening (see Lk. 14: 12). Only on Saturdays they served three meals (the main one after the Synagogue) (Rossé 1992: 578).

He feels good in their company, they understand each other perfectly. If it were possible, he wished they were always close to him. Since it is impossible to establish a friendship with everybody, in fact the circle of friends is just as limited and exclusivist for other persons considered as strangers. Within the group there is an atmosphere of communion because they all think alike, they have the same rank or social status, the same tastes, they are connected by a sincere affection. Friendship consolidates and intensifies through continuous relations, constant changes and frequent rediscoveries. In fact, it is a real pleasure to be together (Koenig 1985: 85).

And the Teacher continues by making a second proposal: "Do not invite your brothers". The name "brothers" must be understood literally as blood relatives. It is important to remark how powerful the relations between the persons tied through a physical bond, as well as through affection are, especially between the sons of the same parents, who form the main nucleus of the family. The union grows in times of common joy and in troubles. Even when they are apart, they remain strongly anchored in their origins and they have the pleasure of finding each other, of hearing and seeing each other. At the most important holidays, but not only then, there is the custom of meeting the brothers to spend some time of happy communion (Pitt, Stengers 1968: 19).

Jesus does not stop and presents a third objective: "do not invite relatives", meaning the persons of the same filiation. The circle becomes larger from brothers to parents, cousins, uncles, nephews, grandparents, brothers-in-law. Kinship generates a continuous exchange of relations,

affection, interests and mutual help that are born and evolve within the arch of the entire life, from childhood to old age.

He finally presents a fourth directive: “Do not invite rich neighbors”. Surely, the chief of the Pharisees, who received the Teacher, was rich, he was a wealthy person. He invited at the same table persons of the same social rank, rich, important, illustrious. It is always a pleasure to have such guests of high social and cultural rank. The text mentions the fact that the wealthy are “neighbors” that is those who are close, always accessible to ask and grant them favors.

The question occurs for what reason does Jesus offer such unusual advice and urges that sound extremely bizarre.

He says it very clearly: “if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid”. In this case, the polite gesture of inviting to luncheon is repaid; the love circle closes, and the love remains in fact a prisoner of this reward, without having the possibility to spread subsequently and be able to offer. Love is buried by a selfishness that dominates and suffocates its vital elevation and makes it wither and die miserably.

Jesus wants to caution against a love for interest, which at the time when it is offered thinks, in fact, at its reward. It is not a completely free, open and sincere love.

When Jesus changes the first list of friends, brothers, relatives and rich neighbors, with a second one constituted of poor people, the crippled, the lame, the blind, He leads us to understand the fact that those from the second list take the place of those from the first list in order to be considered true brothers and friends.

What matters is completion, meaning the resurrection of the righteous, when love will triumph over death and over all the selfish elements that lead in the end to death.

With such a belief and hope man has to look at the Messianic banquet, at the feast of the kingdom, as Luke leads us to understand when he speaks about the one who “blessed will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God” (v. 15). In fact, the privileged that enter to the feast and receive the invitation of the kingdom are precisely them: the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind (v. 21-24).

The one who follows Christ already has Him within in a certain way and has felt an attraction towards Him; the one who received Him cannot

help but follow Him and walk on His steps. In fact, the central meaning of these various movements resides in the Person of Jesus Christ, who must be listened to, hosted, followed and preached. He is the axis around which everything is supported, explained and moves.

3. Martha and Mary (Lk. 10: 38-42)

In the village (εἰς κώμην) where the Lord arrives, there lives a woman who takes the initiative to welcome Him into her home together with His disciples. Luke omitted Bethania name, in Jesus journey, even if is recognized from John's Gospel (11: 18) (Bădiliță 2016: 447). It is meal time, but the text does not mention whether it is lunch or dinner time. The Teacher accepts the invitation and accommodates in Martha's home, an Aramaic name which means "lady". She proves to be a real lady, generous and welcoming. As a good mistress and servant between the walls of her home, she deals personally with the wellbeing of her home. She was a practical, severe, enterprising woman. The fragment presents several interesting points regarding the woman's dignity, who is not considered by our Lord Jesus Christ as a servant of the household, but as one of God's daughters.

After he has indicated the names of the two women and the manner in which Martha invited the Lord Jesus Christ, the evangelist immediately puts into contrast their behavior, indicating what they "do" meaning the attitude they present related to the arrival of the guest. Mary sits at the Lord's feet and listens to His words; her sister is very preoccupied, her soul is very tormented, in the middle of many household duties. For Martha it is an honor to receive someone like Jesus, who was already known everywhere, a powerful prophet in word and deed. On the other hand, there is the teacher, a divine guest, Who prepares for everybody the feast of the word of God, who distributes His vivifiant food. Paradoxically, the one Who hosts and receives the people who are willing to taste the food of His truth, of His wisdom and of His words is hosted.

Mary disregarding customs and listening to her inner will to be a disciple of a Teacher with a superior wisdom, sits at his feet to listen to His word, which is the truth spoken in a human language.

But there is not just one way to be virtuous. It is then shown, by the example of Martha and Mary, in the works of one, active devotion, in the other the religious attention of the soul to the word of God; if it conforms to faith, it passes before

the works themselves, as it is written: "Mary has chosen the best part, which will not be taken from her. Let us study, then, too, in possessing what no one can take away from us, by listening not to distracted, but attentive: for it happens at the very grain of the heavenly word to be stolen, if it is sown. along the road" (Lk. VIII, 5, 12). Be, like Mary, animated by the desire for wisdom: this is a greater, more perfect work. May the care of the ministry not prevent the knowledge of the heavenly word. Do not rebuke and do not judge idle those whom you will see occupied with wisdom: for Solomon the pacific sought to have him in his place (Sag., IX, 10, Prov. VIII, 12). Yet no one reproaches Marthe for her good offices; but Mary has the preference, for having chosen a better part. For Jesus has many riches and makes many gifts: so the wisest chose what she acknowledged to be the main thing. Moreover, the Apostles did not consider it best to abandon the word of God and to serve at the tables (Acts VI, 2); but the two things are a work of wisdom, for Stephen also was full of wisdom and was chosen as a servant. So that the one who serves obey the doctor, and that the doctor exhorts and animates the one who serves. For the body of the Church is one, if the members are diverse; they need each other; "The eye can not say to the hand, I do not desire your services, nor even from head to foot" (1 Cor. XII, 12 ff.), And the ear can not deny that it is from the body. For if there are any, the others are necessary. Wisdom lies in the head, activity in the hands; for "the eyes of the wise man are in his head" (Eccl. II, 14), since the true sage is the one whose spirit is in Christ, and whose inner eye is raised to the heights; also the eyes of the wise man are in his head, those of the madman in his heel. (St. Ambrose of Milan, Commentary on Luke)

For her this moment is the divine feast, food for life. The rest is left on a second place, as a less important fact. We cannot give up our relationship with the Heavenly Father not even when the duties regarding our material life are more demanding, when "Martha's" growing duties absorb us more and more (Rossé 1992: 361). We may work with great enthusiasm, but don't succeed; we may raise fortunes without capitalizing anything in Heaven, we may learn a lot and forget something that is vital for our salvation. Having such a guest represented a unique opportunity and she capitalizes this blessed occasion to be able to listen to Him.

There is also another perception, mundane and allegorical in the same time, regarding the profit purchased by the two host-sisters: Martha's behavior is generated by a childish love, inelegant yet, a love addressed to Jesus the man, although it is a religious kind of love. But it is a love that wants to deserve, to gain thankfulness and appreciation from the other (Dillon 1978: 80). Martha struggles "to do" to gain the Other's love and respect. Mary stopped her effort of gaining the Lord's "love"

through exterior acts, by taking a step forward: she receives Jesus Christ just as she is and sits close to Him, offering Him her complete and utter attention and affection. God is the one who loves us infinitely. And if He loves us with such a love, then we will respond to His love in our own personal manner, because we are loved. But the principle consists of the fact that He still loves us! He first loved us (1 Jn. 4: 19).

The double pronunciation of her name "Martha, Martha" (Lk. 10: 41) does not represent an admonition, but a solemn calling (Lavatori, Sole 2017: 330). What Martha does is accompanied by concern and torment, by a division. Martha's work is not pure action that starts from love and answers to love with love. Martha wants to be agreeable to the others because of the infinite things she does. Hence she lives in a continuous state of concern and torment that her efforts are never enough. She is concerned of the manner in which she tries to satisfy our Lord Jesus Christ, she is concerned with what she won't be able to achieve and with the manner in which she will accomplish the hospitality she has assumed.

4. Jesus rejected by a village of Samaritans (Lk. 9: 48-54)

Jesus thus distances himself from the retributive perspective implied in this expression and, more generally, in the prophetic oracles of the Old Testament, which projected in a substantially indeterminate future the definitive implementation of the salvation of God and at the same time the inexorable realization of his just revenge. On the contrary, from the beginning to the end of his ministry, Jesus offers everyone only signs of mercy and solidarity. Through this way of behaving, in which any act of divine punishment is absent, Jesus shows that the kingdom he preached and already realized in a definitive way, even if incipient, is that of a God unconditionally good towards every man (Rossé 1992: 413).

The divine "revenge" mentioned in Is. 61: 2b is a "human, too human" trait of the kingdom of God foretold by the ancient prophets (Melniciuc-Puică 2005: 198). Therefore, Jesus distances himself from this kind of human imaginations, dropping a veil of oblivion on them and avoiding to confirm them in the "collective memory" of his interlocutors. The ambivalent eschatological expectation widespread in Judaism of the first half of the 1st century AD he was profoundly connoted in terms of mercy for the faithful observers of the law and revenge for sinners. In the

“today” of salvation that dawns in the earthly existence of Jesus (v. 21), the “revenge” of God is not realized, which, instead - according to at least a series of anti-testamentary texts - would have characterized the “day of the Lord” (Murg 2005: 184).

When they saw this, the disciples James and John said, “Lord, do you want us to say that a fire comes down from heaven and consumes them?” But [Jesus] turned and rebuked them. And they went to another village (9: 54-56). In this way, Jesus does not behave at all like Elijah, who, on the other hand - according to the account of 2 Kgs 1: 10-14 - had even burned a hundred insolent with a celestial fire. The relationship of Lk. 9: 54-55 with this Old Testament story is so striking that some codes added to the request made to Jesus by James and John in Lk. 9: 54 the gloss: (“as did Elijah”).

Despite these “precedents”, Jesus' behavior remains resolutely consistent with his initial discernment in the synagogue of Nazareth: it was seen that on that occasion Jesus had recalled Elijah's sympathetic intervention in favor of the widow of Sarepta (1 Kgs 17: 7.24). But he had made no mention of the chastisements given by the prophet, although well attested in sacred Scripture: from famine to drought, from heavenly fire to the ruin of some kings (cf. Sir 48: 1-6).

5. In Emmaus – Eucharistic hospitality (Lk. 24: 13-25)

The second important moment which exemplifies rural hospitality in this study is the episode of the disciples travelling to Emmaus, from chapter 24 of the Luke Gospel.

The fragment is divided into two parts: the first evocation (Lk. 24: 13-27) presents the physical and inner road that the two disciples take to arrive to complete faith into the Resurrected Christ. They move from despair to hope, from disappointment to new expectations, from darkness to light, from a tough and untrusting heart to a heart that starts to burn.

In the second part (Lk. 24: 28-35) Jesus is finally recognized by the two disciples when He broke the bread, in the intimacy of an environment of common living, in a house from the village (εις κώμην) of Emmaus. These are two fundamental and necessary moments to the extent when they cannot exist one without the other, to come to an authentic choice of faith in Christ dead and resurrected. Cleopas and the other disciple discuss

about the death of “Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people” (Lk. 24: 19), and inside the house, after He “disappeared from their sight” (Lk. 24: 31) they examine themselves out loud: “Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?” (Lk. 24: 32).

In Lk. 24: 13-16 the evangelist presents the situation: he mentions the time – it is the first day after Saturday – that is for the Jews the first day of the week after the rest of the Sabbath; for Christians this will become Easter day. Then the hagiographer presents information regarding the place: it is the road from Jerusalem to the village (εις κόμην) of Emmaus. The distance of seven miles presents difficulties: one cannot consider that village Emmaus mentioned by the tradition, because it was situated at a distance of 32.5 km. The variant with 20 miles is rather suspected to be under the influence of the tradition from Nicopolis, privileged in the time of the bishop Eusebius of Caesarea. Several valid arguments lead us to believe the Gospel is speaking about Ammaus, situated only 4 miles west of Jerusalem that was a military colony under Vespasian and today is named Kulonyeh (Lavatori, Sole 2017: 330). Moreover, the relatively short distance and the doubt that tradition appeared because of the close resemblance of the names creates difficulties. Qubeibeh corresponds to the distance mentioned in the Bible (seven miles), a village known for its tradition of the medieval pilgrims. But there is no indication that this settlement was once called Emmaus (Perrot 1982: 165). The disciples had a few hours of private lesson, and the reader finds himself in front of a single verse: “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself”. (Lk. 24: 27).

Hence, Jesus revealed Himself to the disciples in Emmaus (Rossé 1992: 1021). But is it possible that a simple, common, gesture, that of breaking the bread, accompanied by blessing – a gesture that each head of a family repeated for every meal – was accepted without any other questions by the eleven disciples (Jn. 21: 13) and by the two (Lk. 24: 35), as a recognition of the Resurrected one? It is not the gesture in itself the cause of acknowledging the Resurrected Christ, it is only the occasion: those who have followed Jesus all over Palestine, certainly recognized in Him other signs as well.

Saint evangelist Luke says that the two asked the traveler inveterately to interrupt his journey: "Stay with us for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over", while He seemed to be eager to continue further.

It was necessary to test them to see if, not yet loving him as God, they were at least capable of loving him as a traveler. Truth journeying with them, they could not remain strangers to love: they offered him hospitality, as one does for a traveler. Why, moreover, do we say that they proposed to him, as it is written in our gospel, "They pressed him." This example shows us that we should not only offer hospitality to travelers, but to accept it.

The disciples set the table, offer food; and God, whom they did not recognize in the explanation of Holy Scripture, they recognize it in the breaking of bread. It is not by hearing the commandments of God that they have been enlightened, but by putting them into practice. Is it not written, "It is not those who hear the law who are righteous before God, but those who practice it will be justified" (Rom 2: 13). Thus, whoever wants to understand what he has heard must hasten to accomplish with his works what he has already managed to understand. As you can see, the Lord was not recognized when he spoke, but he deigned to be recognized when he was given food. Love, dear brothers, hospitality, love works inspired by charity. (cf. St. Gregory the Great, *Homily 23 on the Gospels*)

Jesus lets them to be the one asking Him to stop with them. He doesn't want to impose on them; His presence and closeness must be asked for willingly. To this respect one may observe His explicit will to move His disciples' hearts with a sign of love (Preda 2010: 169). In fact they wished for a longer and more profound relation, to establish with him a true friendship, by inviting Him to stay for dinner that evening. The act of eating together expresses very well the intimacy and sincerity of friendship.

Hence, the disciples come out of their introversion, becoming open to receiving the other, because they realize the day comes to an end and it is not good for him to continue His journey during the night (Constantinescu 1965: 246). They no longer think of themselves, but they become preoccupied with the unpleasant situation of that traveler, whose words made their hearts vibrate profoundly. They are no longer the prisoners of their inner world, but they are open to a new manner of thinking and being (Marcu 1956: 60). They arrived to their destination and as they were about to enter the house, the *Stranger* continues his journey.

After a dialogue during which the Stranger, the walkers approach the village and the disciples urge the stranger to accept their offer of hospitality (Delanoux 2012: 88): Καὶ παρεβιάσαντο αὐτόν, λέγοντες, Μείνον μεθ’ ἡμῶν ... Lk. 24: 29. And they retain this *Stranger*, because they loved Him very dearly. And the *Stranger* accompanies them inside the house. Καὶ εἰσῆλθεν τοῦ μεῖναι σὺν αὐτοῖς Lk. 24: 29. And the *Stranger* takes a loaf of bread and breaks it. And they recognize who the *Stranger* is. The only one who was unaware of the events that happened in Jerusalem was... Messiah, Christ, Jesus, their Teacher resurrected from the dead. From Stranger, or pilgrim, he becomes Christ the host that serves and presides as a father the dinner of his recognition (Preda 2010: 169).

Lord Jesus Christ accepts the invitation. He sits with them and assumes the mission to break the bread: Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ κατακλιθῆναι αὐτόν μετ’ αὐτῶν, λαβὼν τὸν ἄρτον εὐλόγησεν, καὶ κλάσας ἐπέδιδου αὐτοῖς (Lk. 24: 30).

If their eyes opened on this occasion (of breaking the bread) one must understand that this was the will of God, for He decided **when**, **where** and **how** to reveal to them, not necessarily in order to be recognized (Tofană 2002: 17). Jesus becomes “invisible” to the two travelers. The theological character of the participle ἄφαντος indicates the lack of a physical visualization. The dynamic of Luke’s narration suggests a special interpretation. We consider that after having explained the Scriptures that foretold His death and glory, Jesus reveals Himself with a gesture or a word that signifies accurately this victory. But because of the formal associations with the Last Supper (Lk. 22: 19-20), the breaking of the bread confirms that He is victorious because the Living one invites to the sharing of His life. The gesture does not have only the function of a consecrating act: the evangelist does not mention the words spoken over the bread or the offering of the bread to the disciples. In Emmaus the sign is performed for the revelation and for the rereading of the series of signs to which the visible act refers (Dillon 1978: 80). The correspondences between Luke 24 and Luke 9 are obvious (Hermant 1997: 536).

In Lk. 24: 32-35 the author describes the two reactions of the disciples, after having recognized the resurrected. A first reaction consists of the exteriorization of their feelings: “They asked each other”, that is

their open their hearts to each other. They tell one another how Jesus touched their feelings and how His word warmed up their hearts while He “opened” the Scriptures (Melniciuc-Puică 2005: 203).

A second reaction gives an impulse to the two to return to the Galileans gathered in Jerusalem to testify about what they just went through (Lk. 24: 35). They leave immediately to Jerusalem, despite of the late hour. They are now announcers of the resurrected Christ, without limits of time or space, with the complete availability of the one who has seen God and lives in communion with Him.

4. Final remarks

From the presentation of the two examples of hospitality (Luke 10 and Luke 24) we may deduce that certain Oriental traditions lost their meaning, and they were redefined in the Gospel according to Luke and then in the social-philanthropic mission of the Church. If in Lk. 7: 44-46 there are presented types of Jewish hospitality (“I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet... You did not give Me a kiss... You did not put oil on My head...”), and the disciples’ answer in their pre-Paschal mission consists of “First say: Peace on this house... Stay there eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages” (Lk. 10: 5.7), we observe here the Christian advice from 1 Tim 5: 10, given to the bishop from Ephesus, to appreciate: “if she [*the widow* n.n.] is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord’s people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds” and the statement from the Epistle to Hebrews 13: 1-2: “Keep on loving one another as brothers and sisters. Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it”. The exterior deeds must be accompanied by an affective involvement in order to produce the mutually advantageous exchange between the host and the guest in general.

Hence, hospitality means living together, participating to the common love of God through people that can be helped: “Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was

a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matthew 25: 34-36).

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