

My paternal grandparents lived just down the road from us. They were the ones who dedicated much of their lives to running the family farm for their respective generation before my father gradually took over the reins. But in addition to being the hard workers out in the fields and in their gardens and around the home, they also did the usual fulfillment of the grandparenting role in spoiling us grandchildren, and yes, if I have to be brutally honest, probably the most with me as the youngest of four, who were only a few hundred feet away. So, it's possible I made my fair share of walks down to their end of our country road. Now, I'm sure there were some actual full-scale meals involved at some point, but what I remember most started with my grandmother around the kitchen table with some Ritz crackers and butter, all while playing cards.

After that quickly became a favorite pastime of mine, unfortunately, it wasn't long before she died. But then my grandfather gradually caved in to the reality that he could not do quite as much around the farm, and so every once in a while, he would invite me down to watch a baseball game on his newly purchased satellite dish, while having popcorn and a 7-Up along with his smile that could light up the entire countryside. So, with both of them it wasn't so much about the intoxicating salt and sugar intake alone.

Instead, the main ingredients of those memorable occasions for me were the heartfelt love, the intentional listening, the dedicated time, set aside, as if I truly meant something to them.

Oddly enough, though, in the background of all those life-shaping times in that house, was this visual rendering of the road to Emmaus, painted originally by the Swiss artist Robert Zund in the late 19th century. For as long as I can remember, it was always hanging there in my grandparents' house: one of those things that hangs on walls that we just walk by without giving a single thought to it. Something that was easily taken for granted, perhaps the same way we do with the moments we have with family, not always knowing that those precious times do not last forever. Regardless, the painting harkens back to the point in the Gospel text we just heard in which Jesus further brings the cherished stories of Scripture to life to two of the disciples who were frightened that their long sought-after Lord had just died; the same Lord who did his fair share of rather simplistic dining with them, but time and time again, by far the most important ingredients with every such occasion were his love and compassion and hope that they didn't seem to find anywhere else.

Soon enough, that road to Emmaus leads to another meal, another rather simplistic one at that: just some bread with a blessing beautifully attached to it, as if to insist to all those in that room of the love that more than managed to overcome death itself, and not just for artistic renderings, not just to be put on biblical pages: love that had to rise because the Risen Lord could not help himself but want to live with those disciples and all those who would gather at Communion tables for seemingly countless generations to come. As if, with that bread, came a most blessed assurance: that this Lord has heard all the fears and all the cries and all the uncertainties on whatever journey has brought you to this table; but with this bread comes the needed holy sustenance to keep on living with joyous conviction anyway. With this bread, comes a blessing not just scattered at random across Jerusalem and Galilee and Emmaus long ago, but a blessing directly from God to you, to whatever fears and cries and uncertainties you bring to this table today.

Of course, the long cherished line of the entire Emmaus story has become "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road?"

But I wonder if the same question can be asked for many children of God who partake of this comparatively simplistic meal: this meal that is set before people around the world quite often now. I wonder if we have our understandable human moments of taking it for granted: that in this meal is the reminder that love triumphed for you. In this bread is the holy insistence that everlasting life is not

reserved for a distant heavenly road, but already made available in the Risen Christ, for you. In this wine and grape juice is a forever-flowing Gospel of grace, as if you certainly matter in the eyes of God.

Yes, looking back at this picture reminds me of some rather memorable moments from decades ago now, moments that I did not always recognize the holiness emerging around a kitchen table and in a living room; not realizing that they just might have been living out their own ministry of love and compassion and making someone believe as if they might just have been a precious child of God, too. As if no matter what road taken in this life, this Risen Christ of ours will always insist on being our steadfast companion through all our days and for all eternity. So, for that Greatest News for all of us, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!