

Day of Reflection - Nov 3rd 2025 – A Monday
The Theology of Encounter: Lessons from the Road

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Preamble

Welcome! I hope our time together is fruitful. It is a dense spiritual exercise. I dispensed with too much theological language and opted instead to use pastoral language and pastoral approach so as to make the point without using a firehose or the heavy handed persuasion of theological purity. I mean when was the last time you used the word '*acedia*'? Plus its definition lacks the warmth of return nor recognition of the hardships usually a part of the apathy. Apathy isn't a position. Apathy is a reaction to the real events of one's life that precedes it.

I do not present the case as dense as this outline. This is for you to keep to reflect upon later. I use a conversational style when presenting. Missing from this outline are some details of the stories I will tell. In keeping with the Seal of Confidentiality, all stories are amalgamations, with approval of the persons involved and the intention of describing the movements and transitions not revealing person or specific circumstances.

Finally, I hope you find yourself in this presentation. This encounter is itself a motion. If you discover something new and find yourself moving again, YAY! Onward to Jerusalem!

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Schedule

Topic: The Theology of Encounter: Lessons from the Road

A Day of Reflection - Schedule

09:45 AM - Coffee and snacks

10:00 AM - Conference

11:00 AM – Confessions – Priests in-residence

Noon - Lunch

01:15 PM – Conference Part Two - Interactive

02:00 PM – Mass

Location

Our Lady of Florida Spiritual Center
1300 US Highway One
North Palm Beach, FL 33408
561-626-1300 # 104
www.ourladyofflorida.org



**Our Lady of Florida
Spiritual Center**
THE PASSIONISTS
WITH YOU.

"Everyday make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament,
and when the duties of your state of life prevent you, visit Him in spirit."

- *Saint Paul of the Cross*

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Morning Session

Opening Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, who have taught the hearts of the faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in his consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Theology of Encounter

This day of reflection is based on the following premise.

1. We are in the **constant process of encounter** with the Lord, ourselves and each other. Lessons from the road is not meant to be a metaphor but rather a place where encounter happens amid motion, uncertainty and dust. The road is a sacramental space.
2. **We experience Grace** not just in the sanctuary but **at our motions, the outset, the transitions, between destinations, and again at the end of our motions.** It is in the 'motion' (careful to not limit ourselves to the phrase 'journey') where we experience the transitional influence/presence of God. God is present at every threshold we experience and is ready to move us toward presence, mercy and union. Movement meets rest. And encounter finds fellowship.
3. We are to be in a type of **kinetic communion**. We are to fully embrace the **incarnational nature of the divine presence.**

Gospel Foundation for Today

The Road to Emmaus is a biblical story from Luke 24:13-35

We will visit several times this story as we go through the theology of encounter. Our centering perspective are the words of Jesus, ***I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do (Jn 13:15)***. The Emmaus story gives us insight on how to handle the thresholds of encounter in a way modeled by the Lord himself. So, first the gospel account. Then the thresholds. Then the gospel account again in light of the ministry of Jesus.

Some Helpful Factoids on the Emmaus Story

Emmaus means 'Hot Springs'. Hot springs are a place people go to achieve some sort of relief – to be warmed again. One might even describe it as an OTC medical practice in the day. Emmaus, there are many so named places near Jerusalem/Judea/Galilee, this one may be 7 miles or 18 miles away – depending on the scriptural manuscript you reference. A seven mile trip is at least 2 hours, an 18 mile trip about 5 hours. The essential point is Jesus accompanied them for at least 2 hours, if not 5 hours.

The Appearance on the Road to Emmaus

A reading from the Gospel According to Luke.

Now that very day two of them were going to a village seven miles from Jerusalem called Emmaus, and they were conversing about all the things that had occurred. And it happened that while they were conversing and debating, Jesus himself drew near and walked with them, but their eyes were prevented

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from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” They stopped, looking downcast.

One of them, named Cleopas, said to him in reply, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know of the things that have taken place there in these days?” And he replied to them, “What sort of things?” They said to him, “The things that happened to Jesus the Nazarene, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, how our chief priests and rulers both handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him. But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place.

Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see.”

And he said to them, “Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.

As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them. And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them.

With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight.

Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?”

So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, “The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!” Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Thresholds of Motion

I propose to you, dear attendee and readers, that the disciples went through the four thresholds guided by the Lord from Flight to Exodus. Then I will give you four examples of the same on the Appalachian Trail and/or the Camino de Santiago. Then I will ask you to think about your own place on the spectrum and how to regain your motion.

Four Major Thresholds

Naming the Thresholds

The four major thresholds are:

- Inertia – Denial of Grace

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- Journey – Openness to Wonder
- Pilgrimage – Intentional Conversion
- Exodus – Total Conformity to the Divine Will

Inertia: Denial of Grace - Frozen, Fighting, Fleeing

In this motion may not be any motion at all or a frenzy of motion. Action becomes proxy for faith and assurance. In this state, a person has suspended all faith, is operating a purely reactive mode. The theological word is *acedia* or the apathy.

The motion is automatic, reactionary and biological. Put your hand on a hot stove – instantly pull back.

The disciples were totally crestfallen. Frozen for three days the weight of what happened finally hit. They fled toward Emmaus. The lowest level: inertia.

Look at the depth of the disappointment:

- **Regret:** Conversing and debating (other translations *arguing*) – possibly even into a fight among them. Why did we not prevent the death of Jesus? ***They [chief priests] handed him over to a sentence of death and crucified him.***
- **Disillusionment:** ***But we were hoping that he would be the one to redeem Israel; and besides all this, it is now the third day since this took place.***
- **Abandoned faith:** ***looking downcast.***

Encounter in Motion

- Jesus himself **drew near and walked** with them. For two to five hours.
- Jesus **asks them**, “What are you discussing as you walk along?” open ended.
- Jesus **asks them**, “What sort of things?” open ended.
- After outlining the disappointment in the Chief Priests and in Jesus, the **flight phases has ended.**
- The Journey phase begins. The disciples are linguistically inviting this stranger to answer them.

Grace waits for us. Grace accompanies us, even if we don’t recognize it. Grace waits for your **answer**.

On the Trail

Many people join the trail in a rush of disappointment, disillusionment, and defeat. Divorce, failed business, tragedy of life and property can shatter our icons and symbols of stability. What I thought was true, is not. What I hoped for in the future was or is an illusion. Extending then, there is no aid, no hope and nobody that cares. Psalm 22. Matthew 27:46. ***Eli Eli lama sabakthani.***

Walk and listen. Walk and listen. Ask questions that are in synch with the motion being made.

Point out the obvious but not apparent to them – their resilience. They are here. Lugging a 40 LBS pack, hiking up 6,000 foot mountains. This flight is also their strength. At this point I ask to take a photo of them on their own phone (for privacy). So they can memorialize the moment. Climbing. Climbing out of the abyss. Jesus replied in a manner of speaking – Climb! i.e., : ***How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke!***

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Here today

Are you in this motion at the moment? You are here at this Day of Reflection. **Reflect:** Do I now or have I ever asked the question, God, why have you abandoned me? The question is a contradiction. If abandoned, there would be no answer. If not abandoned, there is a pathway and a horizon we can't yet see through the fog of reaction.

You sift through my travels and my rest; with all my ways you are familiar. Probe me, God, know my heart; try me, know my thoughts... lead me along an ancient path. (PS 139:3, 23, 24b).

Prayer

Lord, you know. I know. Help me calm myself by resting in you. Let me feel the warmth not of a hot spring but of your divine breath and your warm embrace. Let the spirit of wonder fill my soul. Amen.

Journey – Openness to Wonder

A journey is not necessarily a spiritual path directly or intentionally. However, it is a critical movement, a motion, of wonder. Travel for pleasure often includes delightful natural and man-made sights and sounds. These things invite wonder and awe and contemplation. The openness to wonder is the stage the disciples are at now. They are begging for a reply.

Some women from our group, however, have astounded us: they were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; they came back and reported that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who announced that he was alive. Then some of those with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women had described, but him they did not see."

Understand they are not at the point of return to the prior state of faith in these comments. They are relaying the wonder one has even as a person might gaze on a sunset or a mountain valley or a Moose grazing in the boggy marsh. What are these wonders? How marvelous this potentially good news. He is, at the least, *alive*?

It is in this statement the invitation to enter a journey. While they still walk toward Emmaus, it is no longer in Flight but in Journey. No longer crisis, but in wonder. No longer feels alone but accompanied. ***Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures.***

The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament proclaims the works of his hands. Day unto day pours forth speech; night unto night whispers knowledge (PS 19:2-3).

Grace waits for us. Grace accompanies us, even if we don't recognize it. Grace waits for your **question**.

The Pilgrimage phase begins. The disciples are linguistically inviting this stranger to pilgrimage with them.

On the Trail

Everyone enters this motion on the trail perhaps in parallel with other motions. How could we not be moved by nature? But the journey leaves us empty at night. As we gather around the campfire (yes, we did) the deeper and unanswered questions begin. The deepest yearnings are not satisfied by the Mountains not the Stars but by the depth of the soul asking: as wonderful as it is, *is this all there is?*

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To which I reply: ***Love is the only rational act*** - [Tuesdays with Morrie](#). Best to use general literature. Discussing the contours of love and how it is experienced is the true door to the divine life.

My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the secret recesses of the cliff, Let me see your face, let me hear your voice, For your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely (Sgs of Sgs 2:14).

Here Today

Are you in this motion at the moment? You are here at this Day of Reflection. **Reflect:** Am I responding to the ‘smells and bells’ of faith? Am I limiting my understanding of the divine love to be the natural world and all its wonders? Is the Eucharist cosplay or efficacious? Do I know I am loved? How do I experience love?

Prayer

Lord, you know. I know. Help me go beyond wonder. Help me discover the contours of love. Let us together, wander across the fields together. Let me feel the love that comes with your divine presence. Let the spirit of refreshment fill my soul. Amen.

Pilgrimage – Intentional Conversion

Pilgrimage - (Hebrew/French/Latin) to *Ascend on foot*, be a *foreigner, per ager* (across the fields). Modern pilgrimage is an intentional plan. A movement. A motion is a direction that requires strategy and planning outcomes (however indistinct they may be). An intentional conversion.

As they approached the village to which they were going, he gave the impression that he was going on farther. But they urged him, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening and the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

The invitation is a response to the divine presence. It is now a mutual pilgrimage. An intentional encounter. Let us discover together. From arguing, to discussion, to questions, to answers, to diving deeper.

As the pilgrimage together that night, revelation is possible. It wasn’t until the close of the day and urgency of the day is relieved that we calm ourselves enough to see/feel/know.

And it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, “Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?”

Grace waits for us. Grace accompanies us, even if we don’t recognize it. Grace waits for your **attention**.

The Exodus phase begins. The disciples are linguistically entering their Exodus. The departure from the (recent) past. Entering the life of divine passion.

On the Trail

My trail name is Skittles. Not because I love them (I don’t). But I hand out Skittles to the hikers as they enter camp. If you’ve been hiking for 10-12 hours and just rolling into camp after dusk, you are hungry,

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tired, and cranky and faced with so many tasks to even get to a restful posture. Getting water can be a 1 mile hike (round trip).

A simple table service, a handful of skittles, is enough to turn the corner and make it through the last tasks of the day. Life has a new horizon but for a little sugar. Only then can we hear, listen or see.

Here Today

Are you in pilgrimage? Do you have a plan, a strategy, either a vague or specific destination? **Reflect:** If to journey is to be in a state of wonder and pilgrimage a state of intentionality, how do you merge these two things without losing the wonder for the plans and allow the plans be formed in a framework of wonder?

Prayer

Lord, you know. I know. Help me go beyond wonder and plans. Help me discover the healthy balance of wonder and strategy. Pilgrimage with me. Let us together, then enter into the Exodus. Let me enter the divine pathos. Let my spirit empty making room for the passion gift I am honored to be. Amen.

Exodus – Total Conformity to the Divine Will

Total conformity to the divine will. Exodus - (Greek) - **the Road Out**. The Exodus of Jesus is the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus in Jerusalem, the City of Destiny.

So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, "The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!" Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

The Transfiguration of Jesus

About eight days after he said this, he took Peter, John, and James and went up the mountain to pray. While he was praying his face changed in appearance and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were conversing with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his ***exodus that he was going to accomplish in Jerusalem***. Peter and his companions had been overcome by sleep, but becoming fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As they were about to part from him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good that we are here; let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But he did not know what he was saying. While he was still speaking, a cloud came and cast a shadow over them, and they became frightened when they entered the cloud. Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my chosen Son; listen to him." After the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. They fell silent and did not at that time tell anyone what they had seen.

The Transfiguration is the inauguration of the Passion of the Christ. It sits between the First and Second Prediction of the Passion. It is the revelation of the divine pathos, as pathos. This is not an anthropomorphic theology. This is the expression and exposition of the very interior of the divine love through the person of Jesus in a way that we can understand. Passionate love and pain for a broken world. ***A divine attentiveness and concern*** (The Prophets, Abraham J. Heschel, p.168).

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He was made known to them in the breaking of the bread. You are familiar with Eucharistic theology. The bread is the life of Jesus broken and poured out. The invitation into the divine pathos is the answer to **what does man do with God's concern?** (IBID, p. 169).

Jesus said in reply, "... Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?" They said to him, "We can." He replied, "My cup you will indeed drink" (Mt 20:22b-23a).

Grace waits for us. Grace accompanies us, even if we don't recognize it. Grace awakens your **passion**.

On the Trail

Yes, there were people on the trail in the Exodus with Jesus. Each in their own way. Set free to be an expression of the passion of Jesus. There was one PTSD veteran, after many hours, it was clear he was no longer acute. He was free. He just didn't know it. So I reflected back to him the love he expressed for a woman and his prison of historical PTSD. I showed him the liberation he is in (absence of triggers, life horizon of healthy and achievable goals, and a mature / self-aware affect).

In another case, a PTSD veteran whose preconditioned conflict impersonated PTSD. In his case, a simple prayer to unlock the passion of Christ within him. **Lord, show me the love my Daddy had for me. Amen.**

They are both in their Exodus. Simultaneously leaving behind and entering into passion. True passion. Divine passion of love.

Here Today

Are you in Exodus? Do you empty yourself that the passion of Christ may enter? Do you want to? Are you ready? **Reflect:** If to Exodus is to live the passion of the Christ am I fearful of such a role? Can I ... do I want to drink from the cup? **What do I do with God's concern?**

Prayer

Lord, you know. I know. Help me go beyond Pilgrimage and enter and stay firmly in Exodus. Help me discover passion as mission and person. Let us together, walk in your passion. May my life become an expression of your passion and, ultimately, I become your passion. Let me become inseparable from your divine presence, distinct but not apart. Unique but grounded in you, as you, for you. Let the spirit of abandonment fill my soul with divine passion. Amen.

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Reconciliation

Reconciliation

We are again in motion. The Sacrament of Reconciliation. We move from the conference room to the chapel and offices where priests have come to offer the sacrament. A movement of the Soul. In preparation, our discussion have been about motion and thresholds.

- Which type of motion are you in? (Inert, Journey, Pilgrimage, Exodus)
- How close are you to regressing to the prior state of motion? Why?
- How close are you to moving forward with the Lord to the next threshold?
- What holds you back from the intimacy with the Lord walking together? Away from Jerusalem or toward Jerusalem, either way he is present? Do we allow him to walk? Do we hear any questions? Do we ask him any questions?
- The Others – do I recognize those around me and their thresholds? How did/do I respond to them? A kind word, a morsel of food, prayer, and encouragement? Was their motion easier or harder for having met you?

Garden Walks

The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made grow every tree that was delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When they heard the sound of the LORD God walking about in the garden at the breezy time of the day, the man and his wife hid themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of its street. On either side of the river grew the tree of life that produces fruit twelve times a year, once each month; the leaves of the trees serve as medicine for the nations. (Gen 2:8-9, 3:8, Rev 22:1-2).

We live in the motion between the gardens. Here too you can see the thresholds.

A Common Meal

We are again in motion. I understand the food is quite good here at the conference center. I hope your table fellowship includes reflection on the conference. The first question of our second conference will be: ***Did I move today?***

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Conference Part Two – Interactive

Events since the Motion of Discovery

Again we are in motion. We spent the morning session discussing the spiritual thresholds one experiences when in motion. If anyone would like to share:

Did I move today?

- Question: Did the conference on motion change your approach to reconciliation?
- Question: Did the conference on motion change your approach to table fellowship?

Ministry of Thresholds

What has changed in regard to your helping others in their movement?

Sharing ideas

- Inertia – Denial of Grace
- Journey – Openness to Wonder
- Pilgrimage – Intentional Conversion
- Exodus – Total Conformity to the Divine Will

Sharing My Practices

While on Camino or the Appalachian Trail, I practice a continuous expression of the Holy Rosary. How can they be applied to the motions above?

- The Joyful Mysteries - <https://deacongerrypalermo.blog/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/a-short-story-terror-of-the-night.pdf>
- The Sorrowful Mysteries - <https://deacongerrypalermo.blog/2025/10/20/choose-love/>
- The Glorious Mysteries - <https://deacongerrypalermo.blog/2025/05/22/prayerful-days/>
- The Luminous Mysteries (next up)

Blogging since 2019

A deacon gave a presentation in this place in 2019 discussing the necessity that deacons get in the internet space and share the gospel on this new media. Thus far 2,164 reflections and numerous studies. It changed my understanding of motion.

<https://deacongerrypalermo.blog/>

Holy Mass

We are in motion again. The Celebration of the Holy Mass. The reading today challenges us to be in motion and recognize the motion in the lives of others on this Monday of the Thirty-first Week in Ordinary Time. ***Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” (Lk 14:13-14).***