

Whilst on a tour of Mediterranean countries, Blessed John Henry Newman wrote home to His Mother in January 1833.

He was in a dark place personally; and his words to her about the state of Christianity reflect his feelings of sadness, and disillusionment: “The Christian world [he wrote] is gradually becoming barren and effete, as land which has been worked out and is become sand.”

We too might feel the same about the Church now: but we mustn't yield to disillusionment, and discouragement because we know that: “The Lord has really risen!” Lk. 24: 34

And we mustn't lose heart when we think of those who've left the Church; who no longer consider us credible or relevant.

For a few moments, let's reflect together on this in the light of the story of Emmaus.

The two disciples have left Jerusalem – they're leaving home. They're leaving behind the 'nakedness' of the God who allowed Himself to be nailed to the wood of the Cross.

They're disillusioned by the failure of the Messiah in whom they'd hoped, and who now appeared utterly vanquished, and humiliated.

Here we have to face the difficult mystery of those people who leave the Church, who, under the illusion of alternative ideas, now think that the Church – their Jerusalem; their home – can no longer offer them anything meaningful, and important.

So, they set off on the road alone – with their disappointment. Perhaps the Church appeared too weak, perhaps too distant from their needs, perhaps too poor to respond to their concerns, perhaps too cold, perhaps too caught up with itself, perhaps a prisoner of its own rigid formulas, perhaps the world seems to have made the Church a relic of the past, unfit for new questions; perhaps the Church could speak to people in their childhood, but not in adulthood.

Faced with this situation, what are we to do; what can I do?

We need a Church capable of walking at people's side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church that walks with them on their journey.

A Church able to make sense of the 'night' contained in the flight of so many of our brothers and sisters from 'Jerusalem;' a Church which realises that the reasons why people leave also contain reasons why they can eventually return.

But we need to know how to interpret, with courage, the larger picture.

When I say we need a Church to do these things, I mean each of us; because we are the Church.

Jesus made the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus burn within them.

I would like all of us to ask ourselves today: are we still a Church capable of warming hearts? A Church capable of leading people back to Jerusalem? Of bringing them home?

'Jerusalem' – the Church – where our roots are: Scripture, Sacraments, community, Mary, the Apostles and the Saints, friendship with the Lord...

Are we still able to speak of these roots in a way that will revive a sense of wonder at their beauty, and a desire in people to come home to the Lord?

But, do we – do I – still love them? For, if I don't, how can I hope to attract people to come back to the Lord so that He can make their hearts burn within them?

Sadly, there are many Catholics whose hearts don't burn within them; who live their faith without enthusiasm; who don't want to give out – and to live out - the proclamation of the Gospel!

And this is really sad as it causes Christians to have a negative outlook on life, and on their faith.

Let's not close the door of our hearts to the grace of the Lord so that we become like an icy-cold tomb.

Instead, let's ask Jesus to give us a living heart that burns within us when we hear Him call us by name.

We have a wonderful message to give, but it came at a cost: the Cross....

But it's only through the Cross that we plumb the depth, and scale the height of God's love for us. There, I see my name written in the Lord's wounds.

There, death is crushed to death, and life is mine to live, won through the Lord's selfless love.

This, the power of the cross: Son of God, slain for us. What a love! What a cost! We stand forgiven at the cross.

And all of this is only possible because: "The Lord has really risen!" Lk. 24: 34 for a dead Jesus would be incapable of raising us to new life.

If only we knew that with our hearts, and not just our heads then, like the Emmaus Disciples we'll be able to say: "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with [me on the journey of my life.]" Lk. 24: 32