BOOK REVIEWS

Dominic Lenk, OSB, *Voices from the Upper Room* (St. Louis, MO: En Route Books and Media, 2021), pp. 152, paper, $14.95, ISBN 978-1-956715-16-3.

LUKE 24:33 READS, "And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together *and those who were with them*." Fr. Dominic Lenk speculates in this book about who "those who were with them" were in "the upper room" where the eleven apostles were gathered. Of course, we do not know for sure who these anonymous others were. The Gospels do not tell us. Fr. Lenk invites us to consider or to imagine that among them there may have been people in the narratives of the gospels that we know about, but about whom we do not know much. These include, for example, the landlord who provided the upper room for the Last Supper, the widow of Nain, Simon the Pharisee, Peter's mother-in-law, and so forth. The imaginative thinking about each one constitutes the chapters of the book. We know next to nothing about these people, but with great skill the author invites us to speculate but in a controlled fashion, that is to say, based on what we know both from the Gospels and from the early Christian cultures in which they were written.

The unnamed Jerusalem landlord who offered Jesus an upper room to celebrate with his disciples witnesses the crucifixion from a distance. He thinks to himself, "As the afternoon wore on, it occurred to me that Jesus' disciples would need a safe place to mourn and to recover from this terrible tragedy. After his body had been taken down from the cross, I sent my servants in search of the disciples to invite them to please come to this Upper Room as it might be the only safe place for them to be at this moment" (8). He wants to provide space, comfort, and support to the disciples. This holds true of the anonymous widow of Nain whose son Jesus restored to life. Fr. Lenk also imagines the widow of Nain to have been present in Jerusalem on that first Good Friday, as she thinks, "My

heart ached as I could only imagine the suffering that his own mother was enduring at that moment" (26), thus connecting her own feelings at the death of her son with Mary at the death of her son. Simon the Pharisee, after having Jesus to dinner in his house and after witnessing the woman washing the feet of Jesus with her tears, thinks to himself when everyone is gone, "I realized that even though I am a teacher of the people—that even though I try to live the Law of Moses as an example for the people—I realized that I am a sinner, as well. As I collapsed on the edge of my bed, tears fell from my eyes. Yet, these were not tears of despair. These were tears of hope" (45). Simon Peter's mother-in-law was also in the upper room, and she muses to herself, "Yet, as I sit here and listen to the stories of all those gathered in this Upper Room, I am lost in wonder of what this Man did for so many people. Whether it was a simple word of compassion or, like me, bringing healing of the body, he touched so many lives." (97).

Each one of the chapters in the book constructs a story around a particular gospel character, a story that we cannot know as historical fact, but a story into which we can enter imaginatively through our own life experiences. Since the Second Vatican Council the study of the Scriptures has opened up for Catholics in wonderful ways, not least through the historical critical methodologies that have been applied to them. Equally, in recent decades the ancient practice of *lectio divina* / *divine reading* has been developed by a range of spiritual authors. I think that what we see in this book by Fr. Lenk is something of the rich fruit of his own Benedictine *lectio divina,* especially as it has been shared with his pupils and his students. This is quite simply a delightful book of imaginative meditation, one from which I have profited spiritually, and one that I am most happy to recommend to others.

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