

BACKGROUND:

The word for **recognize** in both the *Odyssey* and the *Gospel of Luke* is *Epignos*, a compound Greek word consisting of *Epi* (meaning - upon) and *Ginosis* (meaning - knowledge). The root of this term is, of course, *gnos* (γνως) from which the English word “**diagnose**” comes. In English it is often spelled *Nous*, which means reason or knowledge as opposed to sense perception.

In both the *Odyssey* and the *Gospel of Luke*, the term *epignos* is intended to convey detailed, unassailable, and trenchant knowledge of *a person*, as opposed to a body, a sign or a message. In both the *Odyssey* and the *Gospel of Luke*, *epignos* is understood within the context of four distinctive narrative patterns: 1) the disappointment and disillusionment of those awaiting the return of their Lord, 2) the Greek code of *xenia* or hospitality to the stranger, 3) the juxtaposition of receiving a message (i.e., that Odysseus will arrive home soon or that Jesus is risen) with the realization of its truth through “living proof,” and finally, 4) the loving surrender of one’s heart as the necessary sign of the true recognition of the person of Odysseus and of Jesus.

In what follows, I have laid out the texts from the Odyssey that deal with the various types of recognition scene involving Lord Odysseus.

1) ODYSSEUS ARRIVES ON THE ISLE OF ITHACA, WHERE HIS PALACE AND KINGDOM RESIDE. THE GODDESS ATHENA REASSURES HIM:

Gray eyes ablaze, the goddess urged him on: “Surely I’ll stand beside you, not forget you, not when the day arrives for us to do our work. First I will transform you—no one must know you. I will shrivel the supple skin on your lithe limbs, strip the russet curls from your head and deck you out in rags you’d hate to see some other mortal wear; I’ll dim the fire in your eyes, so shining once— until you seem appalling to all those suitors, even your wife and son you left behind at home. But you, you make your way to the swineherd first. Wait there, sit with him, ask him all he knows. I’m off to Sparta, where the women are a wonder, to call Telemachus home, your own dear son, Odysseus.

2) BUT WHEN THE TELEMACHUS, THE SON OF ODYSSEUS, SEES HIS FATHER DRESSED AS A BEGGAR HE DOES NOT RECOGNIZE HIM, SO ATHENA TRANSFORMS KING ODYSSEUS AGAIN:

Athena stroked him with her golden wand. First she made the cloak and shirt on his body fresh and clean, then made him taller, supple, young, his ruddy tan came back, the cut of his jawline firmed and the dark beard clustered black around his chin. Her work complete, she went her way once more and Odysseus returned to the lodge. His own son gazed at him, wonderstruck, terrified too, turning his eyes away, suddenly— this must be some god— and he let fly with a burst of exclamations: “Friend, you’re a new man—not what I saw before! Your clothes, they’ve changed, even your skin has changed— surely you are some god who rules the vaulting skies! Oh be kind, and we will give you offerings, gifts of hammered gold to warm your heart— spare us, please, I beg you!” “No, I am not a god,” the long-enduring, great Odysseus returned. “Why confuse me with one who never dies? No, I am your father—the Odysseus you wept for all your days, you bore a world of pain, the cruel abuse of men.”

3) First recognition scene: TELEMACHUS IS STILL NOT CONVINCED

Telemachus broke out, wild with disbelief, “No, you’re not Odysseus! Not my father! Just some spirit spellbinding me now— Why, just now you were old, and wrapped in rags, but now, look, you seem like a god who rules the skies up there!” “Telemachus,” Odysseus, man of exploits, urged his son, “it’s wrong to marvel, carried away in wonder so at sight of your father here before your eyes. No other Odysseus will ever return to you. That man and I are one, the man you see ... here after many hardships, endless wanderings, after twenty years I have come home to native ground at last. **My changing so? Athena’s work, the Fighter’s Queen— she has that power, she makes me look as she likes, now like a beggar, the next moment a young man, decked out in handsome clothes about my body. It’s light work for the gods who rule the skies to exalt a mortal man or bring him low.**” At that Odysseus sat down again, and Telemachus threw his arms around his great father, sobbing uncontrollably.

4) TELEMACHUS AND ODYSSEUS THEN PLOT TOGETHER TO RETURN TO THE PALACE AND RECLAIM IT FROM THE MARAUDERS AND SUITORS WHO ARE TRYING TO FORCE ODYSSEUS' WIFE, PENELOPE, TO MARRY HIM. ODYSSEUS MUST COME TO HIS HOUSE AS A STRANGER:

When young Dawn with her rose-red fingers shone once more Telemachus strapped his rawhide sandals to his feet and the young prince, the son of King Odysseus, picked up the rugged spear that fit his grip and striking out for the city, told his swineherd, " I have some orders— **take this luckless stranger to town, so he can beg his supper there, and whoever wants can give the man some crumbs and a cup to drink.**

[THEN] came Odysseus, up to his own house, looking for all the world like an old and broken beggar hunched on a stick, his body wrapped in shameful rags.

5) Second recognition scene: Odysseus' dog, Argos:

Now, a dog that lay there lifted up his muzzle, pricked his ears ... It was Argos, long-enduring Odysseus' dog he trained as a puppy once, but little joy he got since all too soon he shipped to sacred Troy. In the old days young hunters loved to set him coursing after the wild goats and deer and hares. But now with his master gone he lay there, castaway, on piles of dung from mules and cattle, heaps collecting out before the gates till Odysseus' serving-men could cart it off to manure the king's estates. Infested with ticks, half-dead from neglect, here lay the hound, old Argos. But the moment he sensed Odysseus standing by he thumped his tail, nuzzling low, and his ears dropped, though he had no strength to drag himself an inch toward his master. Odysseus glanced to the side and flicked away a tear...

6) ODYSSEUS REVEALS HIMSELF SLOWLY TO HIS WIFE, PENELOPE, FIRST BY PRETENDING THAT HE WAS ONE OF ODYSSEUS' MEN, WHO SAILED WITH HIM FROM TROY TO CRETE:

PENELOPE SAYS, "now tell me who you are. Where do you come from? You've hardly sprung from a rock or oak like some old man of legend."

The master improviser answered, slowly, "My lady ... wife of Laertes' son, Odysseus, will your questions about my family never end? All right then. **Still, my story will tell you all you need to know.**

7) HIS STORY COMPLETE, ODYSSEUS AS STRANGER ASSURES PENELOPE THAT HER HUSBAND, ODYSSEUS, WILL RETURN SOON:

And so the man is safe, as you can see, and **he's coming home, soon, he's close, close at hand**— he won't be severed long from kin and country, no, not now. I give you my solemn, binding oath. I swear by Zeus, the first, the greatest god— by Odysseus' hearth, where I have come for help: all will come to pass, I swear, exactly as I say. **True, this very month—just as the old moon dies and the new moon rises into life—Odysseus will return!**"

8) PENELOPE RESPONDS BY OFFERING THE STRANGER HOSPITALITY, ACCORDING TO THE ANCIENT CODE OF HOSPITALITY (XENIA: THE OFFER OF A BATH, FOOD, DRINK, AND SHELTER.)

Dear friend, the discreet Penelope replied, "never has any man so thoughtful—of all the guests in my palace come from foreign parts—been as welcome as you ... so sensible, so apt, is every word you say. I have just such an old woman, seasoned, wise, who carefully tended my unlucky husband, reared him, took him into her arms the day his mother bore him— frail as the woman is, she'll wash your feet. Up with you now, my good old Eurycleia, come and wash your master's ... equal in years. Odysseus must have feet and hands like his by now— hardship can age a person overnight."

9) Third recognition scene: Odysseus is bathed by Eurycleia, his nurse from childhood.

EURYCLEIA: "Many a way-worn guest has landed here but never, I swear, has one so struck my eyes— your build, your voice, your feet—you're like Odysseus ... to the life!" "Old woman," wily Odysseus countered, "that's what they all say who've seen us both. We bear a striking resemblance to each other, as you have had the wit to say yourself." The old woman took up a burnished basin she used for washing feet and poured in bowls of fresh cold water before she stirred in hot. Odysseus, sitting full in the firelight, suddenly swerved round to the dark, gripped by a quick misgiving— soon as she touched him she might spot the scar! The truth would all come out. **Bending closer she started to bathe her master ... then, in a flash, she knew the scar— that old wound made years ago by a boar's white tusk when Odysseus went to Parnassus** That scar— as the old nurse cradled his leg and her hands passed down she felt it, knew it, suddenly let his foot fall— down it dropped in the basin—the bronze clanged, tipping over, spilling water across the floor. Joy and torment gripped her heart at once, tears rushed to her eyes—voice choked in her throat she reached for Odysseus' chin and

whispered quickly, “Yes, yes! you are Odysseus—oh dear boy— I couldn’t know you before ... not till I touched the body of my king!”

But Odysseus— his right hand shot out, clutching the nurse’s throat, with his left he hugged her to himself and muttered, “Nurse, you want to kill me? You suckled me yourself at your own breast—and now I’m home, at last, after bearing twenty years of brutal hardship, home, on native ground. **But now you know, now that a god has flashed it in your mind, quiet! not a word to anyone in the house.**

10) Fourth recognition scene: Odysseus’ loyal cowherd and swineherd.

ODYSSEUS IS GETTING READY TO TAKE ON THE SUTORS AND CONFIDES IN HIS LOYAL MEN SO THAT THEY WILL BE PREPARED TO HELP HIM:

But now the king’s two men, the cowherd and the swineherd, had slipped out of the palace side-by-side and great Odysseus left the house to join them. Once they were past the courtyard and the gates he probed them deftly, surely:

“Cowherd, swineherd, what, shall I blurt this out or keep it to myself? No, speak out. The heart inside me says so. **How far would you go to fight beside Odysseus? Say he dropped like that from a clear blue sky and a god brought him back— would you fight for the suitors or your king? Tell me how you feel inside your hearts.**” “Father Zeus,” the trusty cowherd shouted, “bring my prayer to pass! Let the master come— some god guide him now! You’d see my power, my fighting arms in action!”

Come, I’ll show you something—living proof— know me for certain, put your minds at rest. This scar, look, where a boar’s white tusk gored me, years ago, hunting on Parnassus, Autolycus’ sons and I.” With that, pushing back his rags, **he revealed the great scar ... And the men gazed at it, scanned it, knew it well, broke into tears and threw their arms around their master—**

11) Fifth recognition scene: Penelope

THE SUTORS HAVE BEEN SLAIN AND ODYSSEUS IS PURIFYING THE PALACE WITH CLEANSING FUMES. PENELOPE IS STILL NOT READY TO RECOGNIZE HIM:

Penelope started down from her lofty room, her heart in turmoil, torn ... **should she keep her distance, probe her husband? Or rush up to the man at once and kiss his head and cling to both his hands?** As soon as she stepped across the stone threshold, slipping in, she took a seat at the closest wall and radiant in the firelight, faced Odysseus now. **One moment he**

seemed ... Odysseus, to the life—the next, no, he was not the man she knew, a huddled mass of rags was all she saw.

Although she acknowledges his physical presence, and “numbing wonder filled her heart as her eyes explored his face. He seemed... Odysseus to the life”, Penelope will not “speak to him, ask him questions, look him in the eyes” until he shares with her **“secret signs, known to [them] but hidden from the world.”**

“Strange woman! So hard—the gods of Olympus made you harder than any other woman in the world! What other wife could have a spirit so unbending? Holding back from her husband, home at last for her after bearing twenty years of brutal struggle. Come, nurse, make me a bed, I’ll sleep alone. She has a heart of iron in her breast.” “Strange man,” wary Penelope said. “I’m not so proud, so scornful, nor am I overwhelmed by your quick change ... You look—how well I know—the way he looked, setting sail from Ithaca years ago aboard the long-oared ship. Come, Eurycleia, **move the sturdy bedstead out of our bridal chamber**— that room the master built with his own hands. Take it out now, sturdy bed that it is, and spread it deep with fleece, blankets and lustrous throws to keep him warm.” Putting her husband to the proof—but Odysseus blazed up in fury, lashing out at his loyal wife: “Woman—your words, they cut me to the core! **Who could move my bed? Impossible task,** even for some skilled craftsman—unless a god came down in person, quick to lend a hand, lifted it out with ease and moved it elsewhere. Not a man on earth, not even at peak strength, would find it easy to prise it up and shift it, no, a great sign, a hallmark lies in its construction. **I know, I built it myself—no one else ... There was a branching olive-tree inside our court, grown to its full prime, the bole like a column, thickset. Around it I built my bedroom... There’s our secret sign, I tell you, our life story! Does the bed, my lady, still stand planted firm?— I don’t know—or has someone chopped away that olive-trunk and hauled our bedstead off?”**

12) FOR PENELOPE, THIS IS THE LIVING PROOF SHE NEEDED:

Living proof— Penelope felt her knees go slack, her heart surrender, recognizing the strong clear signs Odysseus offered. She dissolved in tears, rushed to Odysseus, flung her arms around his neck and kissed his head “don’t fault me, angry with me now because I failed, at the first glimpse, to greet you, hold you, so ... In my heart of hearts I always cringed with fear some fraud might come...But now, since you have revealed such overwhelming proof— the secret sign of our bed, which no one’s ever seen but you and I.

ODYSSEUS REPLIES, “come, let’s go to bed, dear woman—at long last delight in sleep, delight in each other, come!”

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION:

1) What is the difference between the various types of recognition of Odysseus as Homer describes them? On what basis are the acknowledgements of Odysseus made? Do you sense degrees of recognition? How are they appropriate to the person doing the acknowledging (Telemachus, Eurycleia, the swineherd and cowherd, the dog, Penelope herself?)

2) In what ways is the recognition Penelope finally offers to Odysseus the truest form of *epignos*? How is the “secret shared”, the “living proof” different from the earlier forms of recognition?

THEOLOGY DAY / OCTOBER 11, 2019 / PART TWO: GOSPEL OF LUKE

Luke 24 (New Revised Standard Version)

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. **2** They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, **3** but when they went in, they did not find the body. **4** While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. **5** The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. **6** Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, **7** that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again." **8** Then they remembered his words, **9** and returning from the tomb, they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. **10** Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. **11 But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.** **12** But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

THE WALK TO EMMAUS

13 Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, **14** and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. **15** While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, **16 but their eyes were kept from recognizing him.** **17** And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. **18** Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" **19** He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The

things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, **20** and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. **21** But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place.

22 Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, **23** and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. **24** Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him."

REPLY OF THE UNRECOGNIZED (STRANGER) JESUS

25 Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and **how slow of heart** to believe all that the prophets have declared! **26** Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" **27** Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, **he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.**

FIRST RECOGNITION SCENE

28 As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. **29** But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. **30** When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. **31 Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him;** and he vanished from their sight. **32** They said to each other, "**Were not our hearts burning within us** while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" **33** That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. **34** They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!"

35 Then they told what had happened on the road, and **how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.**

SECOND RECOGNITION SCENE

36 While they were talking about this, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." **37** They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. **38** He said to them, "Why are you frightened, and **why do doubts arise in your hearts?** **39** Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." **40** And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. **41** While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" **42** They gave him a piece of broiled fish, **43** and he took it and ate in their presence. **44** Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." **45** Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, **46** and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, **47** and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. **48** You are witnesses of these things. **49** And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." **50** Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. **51** While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven. **52** And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; **53** and they were continually in the temple blessing God.

QUESTIONS FOR SMALL GROUPS:

1) In comparing the story told by Luke with that of Homer, how many similar patterns can you discern? Try to list them.

2) Where does *epignosko* occur in Luke's account of the walk to Emmaus? The disciples were looking for a body and there was no body to be found. What does that suggest about the "appearance" of Jesus as a stranger, i.e, as "unrecognizable"?

3) In what ways is "We knew him in the breaking of the bread" similar to Penelope's recognition of Odysseus according to the "secret sign?" Looking at the scene of Jesus and the two disciples breaking bread, why is that context (of hospitality being offered and accepted) appropriate for such a recognition?

4) You may wish to discuss your own experiences of "recognizing" the risen Christ and how the juxtaposition of these two texts might be a source of confusion, alarm, or enrichment in your own faith life.