

The Lord Enters Jerusalem

This would be the last time Jesus enters Jerusalem “the killer of the prophets and those sent to her”, an event we commemorate tomorrow (Palm Sunday). Jesus knows of the conspiracy of the Jews and that is mentioned more than once in the gospels. We believe that the Lord went to death voluntarily even though He was a political victim. Did not Caiaphas say “It is better that one man dies for the people” (John18:11). This entrance into Jerusalem, which seemed at first to be one of victory and welcomed by the nation and its children, was a path to death. “The cup of suffering that the Father gives me will I not drink it?”

Jesus, despite His meekness, was confrontational par excellence. And whoever studies the gospels realizes that the sort of confrontations he had would have to end in a disaster. One wonders how a poor unarmed man protected by no one opposes, with such serenity and composure on His part, the chief priests and scribes and the powerful party of the Pharisees, who showed ferocious enmity, such that they were able to strongly challenge the Roman Governor and forced him to give up Jesus to be killed!

He enters the Holy City knowing that He offers Himself as sacrifice; but also knowing that He would launch, with His crucifixion, love into this world; a model of all those martyred whose blood speaks till eternity.

The blood of the man from Nazareth tells us that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...”. Humanity, for the first time, realized that God is not a god of armies despite the fact that the people who call themselves by His name have armies. His blood was the only language of love He spoke to the world with. Love made the Son of God Himself come down to tell the world that their God is such that the only way he can tell them that He loves them is with (the language of) blood.

Time, for Jesus, was not wasted from the day he entered Jerusalem (Palm Sunday) till the day he was killed. There is no room to mention here all what He did during this short duration of time; but it was full of strong actions like the casting out of the traders from the Temple; those that made the Temple a den of thieves. Nothing

is sacred for the thief. Many of them have taken positions in the Church or the government. Do we cast away the thieves from their positions? Are we concerned for the sacredness of this world in all its aspects or do we take it easy because we believe that we cannot combat corruption?

Another unique manifestation is the washing of the feet of his disciples during the Last Supper. Here John puts us in the course of thought behind this action: "Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him." Then he explained the importance of that: "'Do you understand what I have done for you?' he asked them." "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." It means that the greatness of those "great" among us is not complete unless they consider themselves and feel that they are at the feet of all people; and that is so because all others are better than them; and if that feeling is not in them, then they do not belong to Christ. That is so because we are here to serve others around us fully till the end of love. Only that can deliver us from our arrogance.

Perhaps the most eloquent manifestation of Jesus, one that remains forever in the Church, and that derives its meaning from his death and resurrection is the event of the Last Supper (Sacramental Supper) which Luke tells in this way: "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." That became the Holy liturgy in Christianity. Jesus wanted the effectiveness of His death and resurrection to be realized in that form. And the meaning of His words that carry no other meaning is that when you perform this rite in your Sunday meeting, you become me and I become you. That becomes palpable for those who know what it means to say: "I am that whom I'm in love with and he whom I love is I."

What justifies the above view is that the body, in Hebrew culture, denotes the person himself. To eat my body means to eat me; to take me into you so that no

distance remains between me and you. There is no place here for symbolism and metaphor or any other denotation other than its Hebrew denotation. You take me wholly in the Divine Liturgy. And when he says “my blood”; that (blood) is life in Hebrew culture. The meaning here is that my life becomes your life and your life becomes mine.

The meaning of this manifestation of Christ in the Holy Eucharist does not reach its full meaning except in farewell discourse which starts in John 4:31 until the end of John 17. And that speaks thoroughly of the relation of Jesus with the Father and the Holy Spirit as it also tells of the relationship of the believers with Him. I do not think I would offend the New Testament if I said that the Farewell Discourse is its climax. Here you read what He says of himself: “I am the truth and the way and the life”. Here you get to understand the nature of Christ: “He who has seen me has seen the Father”. And here it becomes needless to talk about the “one nature” or the “two natures”. We got to know that the argument over that is one of words only, since no Christian would not believe that he, who sees Jesus, sees the Father. That there is no Christian who would not believe that his Christ is fully God and fully Man.

With the above there is a difficult commandment: “If you love me you obey my commandments.” And this is repeated several times in various ways. The meaning of the Holy Eucharist in the words: “Abide in me and I in you” contains an answer to all those who say that Christianity is only spiritual and is not related to this earth. My question here is whether the earth is only related to the earth or Heaven brings forth the earth? Is not our behavior a projection of Heaven on to Earth. If you do not adopt the meanings of the Farewell Discourse in your life, you would be the type of Christian who builds church buildings, and holds rituals, and your priests would be those who are dressed in some special clothes, and simply put, you would be of a superficial religion that has nothing to do with God’s bright shining light, and His love that is poured down on you from Christ’s heart. Such as that is the richness you would look for if you want to be a “rich” Christian.

All the passion of Christ, which I will not talk about here, is connected to this discourse. What happened to the Lord is directly linked to what He said. And what He said uncovers the meaning of what He voluntarily went through in His life. All the tenderness He shows in the Farewell Discourse, would show in His suffering, in His patience and in His constant communion with the Father before and during His death.

Here I understand what Paul has said to one of the churches: “I know nothing among you except Christ and Him crucified.” 1Cor2:2. If you do not take the crucifixion to become a meaning for your life, it remains meaningless. All what we have has this meaning: which is the manifestation of God in the man Jesus of Nazareth. In Him divinity is shown not as a theory only, but as dwelling in us and a guarantee for us as a Paschal people.

Pascha is this perennial departure from our sins to God’s face; that exodus which, in History, Christ has accomplished in His body and His words. His resurrection is the clear expression that he has risen from the dead alive so that death can no more be effective in Man. So that we would become light and through us also the whole world would become light.

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