

## 11. Jesus Christ at the right of the Father

During the trial before the Sanhedrin and the high priest, it is precisely the confession of being the Son seated at the right hand of the Father that will provoke the definitive condemnation of Jesus.

“Then the high priest said to him, ‘I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?’ They answered, ‘He deserves death.’ Then they spat in his face and struck him; and some slapped him” (Mt 26:63–67).

Here Jesus combines the prophecy of Daniel about the Son of man and the first verse of Psalm 109. He does so to affirm that He is truly the Christ, the Son of God, that the Messiah is the Son of God sent by the Father. With the resurrection and ascension to Heaven, Jesus will forever be at the right hand of the Father, and from there he comes and will come to save and judge the world at the very end of time.

The expression “seated at the right hand of the Power” unites the idea of predilection with that of protection, which the Bible attributes to the idea of “the right.” To sit at the right is the preferred position, the position of communion in love, but when one sits at the right hand of the Power, of the All-powerful, the affective position is joined with the certainty of being defended, protected, sustained, against every enemy and every danger, and so with the faith that God “is at my right, I cannot be shaken” (Ps 15:8).

The image of Jesus “seated at the right hand of the Father” will then always be taken back up in the New Testament and by the Church to describe the position of the Risen one after the Ascension into Heaven. It is taken back up by the Liturgy in the Credo, the Gloria and the *Te Deum*. To the point that taking part in his resurrection means, for us, participating in this “place” that Jesus came to prepare for us in the House of the Father, because where He is we too can also be (cf. Jn 14:2–3).

The Gospel of Mark ends with these words: “The Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by the signs that accompanied it” (Mk 16:19–20).

Jesus, at the right hand of the Father, right away becomes for the apostles and the whole Church the point of departure, the source of the whole mission, of the whole evangelization in words and deeds. It is as if their diffusion in the world always and only started from there, or rather: it is as if the Lord had expanded his position at the right hand of the Father along with the diffusion of the Church. Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father, and yet for this very reason he accompanies his disciples and acts along with them.

This awareness is immediately expressed and announced by St. Peter in his first discourse after Pentecost, thanks to which three thousand people were

immediately converted (cf. Acts 2:14-41). In this discourse Peter cites both Psalm 15 (cf. Acts 2:25-28) and 109 (cf. Acts 2:34). He does this in order to announce the resurrection of Christ, but also to explain the event of Pentecost. Peter summarizes everything, saying: "This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear" (Acts 2:32-33).

Peter's very first preaching announces that the resurrection has put Christ at the right hand of the Father and from there and for this reason he sends the Holy Spirit. Jesus, at the right hand of the Father, receives from Him the Holy Spirit. To sit at the right hand of the Father is the position in which the Son eternally receives the Holy Spirit as predilection, as eternal and absolute love between the Father and the Son. Thanks to the paschal mystery, this trinitarian predilection is shared with us through the gift of the Spirit, through Pentecost.

St. Peter will take this idea back up when he testifies courageously in front of the Sanhedrin: "The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Head and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him" (Acts 5:30-32).

Here, Jesus's being at the right hand of the Father coincides with his being "Head and Savior," with the purpose of obtaining the conversion of Israel and being able to pardon the sins of the people. We always find linked to the image of the right hand the fusion of the idea of power (Christ the Head) and of love (Christ the Savior). The Holy Spirit is given in order to testify to this through the disciples, through the Church.

This awareness of Christ's glory in his being at the right hand of the Father, but at the same time always with us, we find repeated in the letters of St. Paul, of St. Peter, and in the letter to the Hebrews. Let us run through these passages briefly to deepen our awareness of this mystery.

In the letter to the Romans, where Paul speaks of the love of Christ from which nothing and no one can separate us, he writes: "Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom 8:34-35a). Paul's understanding is that, in Jesus's being at the right hand of the Father, is brought to its culmination the whole paschal mystery, the death and resurrection of Christ. The Son's "being for us" in the Father's presence culminates and is eternally perpetuated. Indeed, Jesus lives out for us the position at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us. In this is summarized the love of Christ which frees us from the fear of whatsoever tribulation, hostility, or condemnation for our sin (cf. Rom 8:35). At the right hand of the Father, Jesus assures us of God's love in every circumstance of life.