

4. Thirst for fulfillment

When Jesus cries from the Cross, "I thirst!", and then, right after taking the vinegar, says, "It is finished!" (Jn 19:28,30), he expresses precisely the impossible concurrence of joy and sorrow that he felt in the fulfilled desire for the Father's will.

What does Jesus thirst for on the Cross? To what does his heart aspire? "It is finished – *tetelestai!*", he says, lowering his head and breathing his last. Our heart thirsts for fulfillment, for fullness. But of what fullness is Christ speaking? What fullness sees itself accomplished in his thirst, in the vinegar they give him to drink and, finally, in his death? John understood it, saw it, emphasized it, as the other evangelists did elsewhere, in each step of the Passion: the fullness that Jesus sees being accomplished is that of the Scriptures. And for Jesus the Scriptures are nothing other than the expression and description of the Father's will.

A young friend's father, sick from a tumor, was reading a book of mine in the last weeks of his life, and he said that, if we had met, he would have ask me why in the Gospel there is such emphasis on the expression "to fulfill the Scriptures." He was not managing to understand the reason for this insistence, which seemed exaggerated to him and little superfluous. We did not meet, and so his question was reported to me after his death, and now he will receive the answer directly from God.

Certainly, the evangelists' preoccupation was principally to show that Jesus was the Messiah expected by Israel, and that his life, especially his passion, death, and resurrection, were announced by the Scriptures, and Jesus came also to illuminate what the Scriptures announced and which could not be understood before it took place. But it is true that, deep down, this explanation is not enough, because it would be like the fulfillment of the Scriptures in Christ were helpful only for us. Rather we should think that the fulfillment of the Scriptures was helpful first of all for Jesus himself, was important for Jesus himself too. Because in this fulfillment, Jesus was meditating on the accomplishment, in his life, of the Father's will and this, so to say, confirmed and nourished his free, filial obedience.

The full joy of Christ was, indeed, to see the Father's will come and be accomplished through Him and around Him. When they gave him the vinegar, let's wonder if Jesus did not think of psalm 68: "When I was thirsty they gave me vinegar" (Ps 68:22)! That is, up to the last instant, his every sorrow, every wound, every act of hatred and scorn that he underwent, his every feeling, even that of being abandoned by God – "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?" (Ps 21:2) – in all of it Christ saw the Scriptures being fulfilled, and this confirmed for him that what was happening was the will of the Father, not the will of the scribes and the Pharisees, not the will of the high priest and the Sanhedrin, not the will of Pilate or Herod, but the will of the Father. And this was the full joy of Jesus, the fulfillment of his heart.

How Jesus must have felt that the words of Psalm 39 were his! "Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required. Then I said, 'Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will [this is my joy!], O my God; your law is within my heart'" (Ps 39:7-9).

When a word of Scripture is given to us, when we feel that it is a word for us, unexpected, that perhaps contradicts us in what we are living or in the way we are living, it is important that we understand that we have been called to enter in this paradoxical joy of Jesus Christ, and our encounters and our meditations should always help us enter into this awareness, into this “understanding of the end” of life and of the heart, as the title of Psalm 41 was suggesting to me.

Is it possible for us, too, to find the fullness of joy in the accomplishment of the Father’s will in every circumstance and feeling of life? Is it possible for us to have the experience of the soul of Christ, of that concurrence of joy and sorrow, or better, of this joy in sorrow at the mere recognition that what is occurring is the occurrence of God’s will?

Certainly it is possible, because Christ, becoming man, lived for nothing except to communicate the experience of it to us.

At the foot of the Cross, Mary receives the same experience from her Son and she consents to it, and she teaches John to do the same. In her immense sorrow she remains silent, because she remains attentive, “she reads” with Jesus and in Jesus the fulfillment of the Scripture, of God’s will, of God’s design, to which she has said “yes” from the beginning. Or better: she said, “*Fiat!*”, which is more than simply saying, “yes.” *Fiat*, which means “let it occur,” “let it happen,” “let it be done,” “let it be accomplished,” is a “yes” that opens itself to the event that God is bringing about by giving fulfillment to his Word. “Behold the handmaid of the Lord: let it be done unto me according to your word” (Lk 1:38).

Mary responds in this way right after the angel has told her that “nothing is impossible with God” (Lk 1:37). Now, if one takes the text literally, this verse could be translated thus: “Every word will not be impossible for God”, as, after all, the Vulgate translated it: “*non erit impossibile apud Deum omne verbum.*”

Mary thus echoes the Word of God which is able and willing to become an event in her and through her. Her freedom allows the word of God to be accomplished in an event, to come about as a Word to which God can always give fulfillment.

And at the Cross, all is renewed, all is completed. The Word made flesh to die and rise is completed, and the freedom of Mary is completed, all *Fiat* to the Word of the Father. For this reason, for the Virgin, too, sorrow coincides with the mysterious joy of seeing the Father’s will come about.

The point, for each one of us, is always to let our freedom be converted into a *Fiat* that can allow the Word of God, that is the will of God, to be accomplished in us and through us. In this consists the core of our conversion.

What a mystery that the Word for which nothing is impossible should and will bend itself to the consent of a fragile and wretched human liberty like our own, in order to be accomplished! Mary was without sin, but she had the sense of her human weakness, she had the awareness of being a wretched servant, as she sings in the Magnificat (cf. Lk 1:48). The feeling of her frailty, lived out as humility, was not an objection, but rather an opening up to the completion of the omnipotent will of God.