

7. The Paschal Mystery gives meaning to everything

To have a sense for the things of God – which Jesus emphatically asks Peter to have – is to be open to the words and actions that God speaks or determines, to be willing to allow oneself to become possessed by what God wants and gives, or takes, with trusting faith that this is the good for oneself and for all. It is a listening to the actions of Christ which allows him to determine and to transform us down into our hearts, down to the roots of our freedom.

Jesus did not announce his death and resurrection to his disciples so that they would understand but so that they would open themselves to an action that would be “explained” by itself *as it took place*, that would itself have given meaning to itself, because the paschal mystery is the origin and the substance of every meaning, of the meaning of everything. We should not be the ones to explain the paschal mystery or to give it a meaning; instead, we have to allow the event of the paschal mystery to explain everything, to give meaning to everything, beginning with ourselves. Mary teaches us that it is possible to think about what is from God only if silence, poverty and openness of heart find a home within us. The silence of Mary at Nazareth let the word of Christ ferment as he became an event.

Mary remains in this position through the Cross, through Pentecost – for her entire life. Always, whether she was with Jesus as a twelve-year-old or as an adult at Cana, her final and symbolic horizon is the paschal mystery, the day and the Hour of the death and resurrection of the Lord. And so the Redemption of the world was the horizon for her every gesture, moment and thought during the day. This is the Christian memory that transforms our heart and our life into a discipleship that allows Christ to move forward, to advance in the salvation of the world.

Let us return to Peter and to the other disciples, because it is like returning to ourselves, to our way of living – sinners that we are. Mary lived her vocation with an immaculate heart, and so with total and incorrupt freedom.

When Jesus begins to teach his disciples, immediately after chastising Peter, he teaches by drawing them into an openness of heart such that his death and resurrection can grasp the disciples as they grasp Jesus, and so find in them the obedience and docility of heart that he expresses to the Father.

After the very harsh chastisement that Jesus levels against Peter, he immediately begins to recall his disciples onto the right path. He does not reject anyone, he does not regret giving us our vocation. Just as with the People of Israel, God always and immediately restarts his relationship with his disciples, who always lose their way and fall down noisily. But here his restarting has an intensity that we could say is *final*, because Jesus is about to enter into the final and completed period of his mission.

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father’s glory, and then he will repay everyone according to his conduct.’” (Mt 16:24-27).

Let us remind ourselves above all that this teaching is expressed by Jesus as a reflection of what he had just announced about himself: “From that time on, Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised” (Mt 16:21).

To suffer greatly, to be killed, to rise again: passion, death and resurrection. This is the scene, the painting, the icon, the event on the back of which – actually: within which – Christ describes to his disciples their vocation, the discipleship that they are called to live, the salvation, the prize, the fulfillment of their life, of their own personality or “I”, the final perfection that Christ, when he comes in the glory of the Father, will render to everyone who will have allowed himself to reflect in his own existence the paschal event of the Son of God.

Christ is not proposing a morbid, masochistic conception of life because there is the resurrection, that is, there is the real prospect of finding one’s own life, of gaining it, of living it entirely according to the depth it deserves, for which it was made, all the way to its eschatological destiny of being introduced into the glory of the Father thanks to the embrace of Christ – in our definitive encounter with Him.

But this fulfillment, this resurrection of life in Him and with Him, Jesus proposes it to us within an absolute realism that does not deceive, that does not make us simply dream. Christ does not let us dream from afar about the resurrection, glory, fulfillment – like a mirage. Rather, he accompanies us, goes before us, in the real experience of the resurrection. We cannot rise again without dying, we cannot experience the resurrection without passing through death, or at least through the recognition that we are dead and we need the life of Another.

Above all what is important is to hear in these words of Jesus, which announce his own passion, death and resurrection, is the new way of thinking about ourselves, about our own “I” that the paschal mystery reveals to us. Salvation, for us and for everyone, consists in embracing our common destiny in the glory of the Father which Christ came to give us. And he came to give it to us by going to the depths of our common destiny of loss, abandonment of God, of death. It is the mystery expressed by the icon of the Resurrection in which Christ descends all the way to hell to free Adam and Eve and to make them rise to share His glory, His life, redeemed and eternal. When Jesus says to his disciples that whoever wants to follow him must deny himself and take up his cross, that he must lose his life to gain a life that has more value than the entire world, in essence he is already describing the scene of the resurrection which redeems Adam by freeing him from the grip of hell.