

BIBLICAL PAGES

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Jesus, a man of His time and space, shows us our true and full humanity

Lectio n° 6 Tears

Introduction

The Gospel of St Luke is characterised by Jesus' journey towards the Holy City, where His 'exodus' will be fulfilled (cf Lk 9:31). The ascent to Jerusalem is marked from the very beginning by a kind of hardening of the face (cf Lk 9:51), to show that He is resolute in His decision to go there and is perfectly aware of what is expecting Him. However, when He is in sight of the City, Jesus' hardened face loosens up and he breaks into tears. That uncontrollable emotion shows the depth of Jesus' human feelings and suggests a completely different image of God from that which is common in our minds.

First of all, tears evoke Jesus' set of emotions and feelings. Jesus' tears reveal God's greatest mystery: His passion for us. What God told Jeremiah now comes to life in Jesus: "So say this word to them: May my eyes shed tears night and day, unceasingly, since the daughter of my people has sustained a fearsome wound, a crippling injury." (Jr 14:17)

Jesus sheds tears over Jerusalem. Judgement will fall over it. Jesus cannot prevent it. Tears show that He is impotent. His impotent tears hide a deep mystery: God hides His power in Jesus' saving love and in His weakness. He does respect man's liberty so much, that He prefers crying impotently in Jesus rather than depriving the human creature of his liberty. Jesus' tears constitute the last invitation to penance addressed to a city obstinate in its rejection and wickedness. Jesus' tears express His utter weakness, that is, the power of love that led Him to the cross (cf 2 Co 13:4) and brought us salvation.

Jesus' tears when He comes in sight of Jerusalem is God's fulfilled revelation. It is the definitive feature on the Master's face, revealing how even God can shed tears, not over Himself as a nauseatingly devout spirituality would lead us to believe. God sheds tears because He realizes that His people is perverted and, consequently, He calls it to conversion. God's tears are a sign of both His powerlessness and His saving omnipotence.

In front of the City, symbol of the Jewish people and also of the whole of humankind, Jesus had exclaimed: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you that kill the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I longed to gather

your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you refused!” (Lk 13:34)

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit:

“Our God, Father of Light,
You sent Your Word into the world
through Your Law, the prophets and the Psalms,
and in the last days You willed
that Your very Son,
Eternal Word dwelling in You,
made us know You,
the one and only God:
send Your Holy Spirit upon us,
so that He may give us a heart
capable of listening,
so that He may get rid of the veil upon our eyes
and lead us to the complete truth.
We beseech You
through Christ our Lord,
blessed in the Age of Ages.
Amen.
(Community of Bose)

1. Lectio

(to read the Word / to listen to it)

Luke 19:41-44

41 As he drew near and came in sight of the city He shed tears over it 42 and said, 'If you too had only recognised on this day the way to peace! But in fact now it is hidden from your eyes! 43 Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; 44 they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognise the moment of your visitation.'

- Let us read the text more than once, slowly and making a pause each time...
- Let us go into the text's depths.

This text immediately follows Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, acclaimed by the crowd and reproached by the Pharisees (cf Lk 19:28-40). Jesus was riding a colt (19:35); the crowd was acclaiming Him (19:37) and He was approaching the downward slope of the Mount of Olives, from which the whole city could be seen, with the Temple in the foreground. This was the path that most pilgrims trod: at this point Jerusalem appeared to their sight, and they were longing to reach it in order "to see God", as any pious Jewish man wished: "I thirst for God, the living God; / when shall I go to see the face of God? / I have no food but tears day and night, / as all day long I am taunted, 'Where is your God?'" (Ps 42:2-3)

It is interesting to point out that in Psalm 42 tears denote the thirst for God; they are an expression of the quest for God.

Jesus too, in a short while, will be able to see God, a pilgrim among pilgrims... God becomes a pilgrim in our Holy City!

According to the synoptic gospels, Jerusalem is the geographical / spiritual centre of the life of each and every Jewish man who, three times a day, turning towards Jerusalem, addresses God with the paschal acclaim: "Today as slaves in exile, next year in Jerusalem!"

We can highlight two parts in the text of our Lectio (Lk 19:41-44): lines 41-42; and 43-44.

41 As he drew near and came in sight of the city He shed tears over it 42 and said, 'If you too had only recognised on this day the way to peace! But in fact now it is hidden from your eyes!

The verb 'to draw near' of line 41 is very important, given that it defines Jesus' gaze which is of special value in St Luke's view. When He 'came in sight of the city, He shed tears'. The verb used here means 'to lament', not just 'to weep'. Jesus' gaze then is intense and full of sorrow: He can only acknowledge the situation the City is in, with no power to intervene. With this gaze full of tears, the Master is aware of His failure: in the same way as they did with the Prophets, the Israelites are refusing to recognise God's salvation. Therefore, the enemies will rage against the people.

Line 42 is made up of three phrases. The first one is: "If you too had only recognised on this day..." It is full of emotion and expresses a regret. "If you too had only recognised..." This is not an intellectual acknowledgement, but rather an existential recognition.

The second phrase is: "...on this day the way to peace". This refers to Jesus' coming: to recognise this day, that is the present day, means to be aware that it is the very day that leads to peace. 'Peace' here does not refer only to a period free from wars, but also to a harmonious relation with God, to His presence amongst His people.

The third phrase is: "But in fact now it is hidden from your eyes!" 'Now' highlights that the inability to recognise Jesus' coming and to welcome Him occurs in the present. Now, everything is hidden to the eyes of Jerusalem, which is not able to recognise God's revelation. While nobody can be denied the freedom to shut his eyes (and from that moment onwards everything will be obscured), there will be a time when "everything now covered up will be uncovered, everything now hidden will be made clear" (Lk 12:2). However, prior to those future days, there will be the days of doom.

43 Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; 44 they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognise the moment of your visitation.'

Given that Jerusalem is blind and stubborn in its rejection, Jesus has nothing to do but to proclaim the day of doom. In Jesus' words we can hear the same style and tone of the great prophets like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, but with the dramatic force and the urgency which come from the awareness that this is the last chance of salvation. All hesitations are to be banned: the future belongs to God and is proclaimed by the Prophet; Jesus, while announcing the days of doom, 'sheds tears over it'. The salvation that Jesus proclaims has to do with man's relation with God. It is fulfilled not on the margins of human history but at its core, heavily conditioning it from inside. Either peace or war, liberation or slavery, are two alternatives providing a visible and historical 'face' to God's salvation.

In line 43 Jesus describes the siege and fall of Jerusalem by the Roman troops of Vespasian-Titus, which would take place in 70 AD. The terms used in the Greek text give the idea of being encircled and hemmed in on every side. Line 44 forecasts the capture of the City, giving details about the destiny of its inhabitants and of its buildings. They are extremely cruel: the inhabitants will be killed and the city utterly destroyed.

Not being able to recognise God's visitation will lead to wasting the time of God's favour, the moment when salvation is available and – as St Augustine says – having to start looking for it anew. In St Luke's view, 'kairos', the 'time of God's favour' is the precious occasion offered by God; the same can be said about the term 'episkopé', 'visitation': this is the arrival and benevolent presence of God's Envoy. Both terms express a kind of nostalgia: 'visitation' reminds us of the time of Jesus' infancy; while 'the time of God's favour' reminds us of the beginnings of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. Here, on the contrary, the positive occasion unfortunately stumbles against man's rejection.

Jesus did not come to punish but to save; to bring peace, not war. Israel had fled away from God, they had forgotten and offended Him. Jesus came to re-establish the good relation between them. His humble and simple appearance revealed the peaceful goal of His coming. Jerusalem did not recognise the day of forgiveness and grace, and it would have to experience the day of anger and the extermination of all its inhabitants. God's grace and goodness turn to anger, vengeance and doom, if they are rejected.

2. Meditatio

(to meditate on the Word / to let it resound)

- After reading the text, let the Word resound in our hearts... Jesus' eyes, through His tears, see the days of doom, but they are also able to overcome darkness and foresee the days of salvation. May those tears help us go back to the Lord!

3. Oratio

(to pray the Word / to repeat it)

May You deign Yourself, Lord Jesus,
to come near this sepulchre of mine,
to wash me by Your tears,
given that my eyes are hardened
and I have not enough tears to wash my sins away.
If You shed tears on my behalf, I will be saved.
If I am found worthy of Your tears,
I will get rid of the smell of all my sins.
If I am found worthy of just some of Your tears,
You will call me from the sepulchre of this body of mine
and You will say: 'Come out!'
so that my thoughts may not be imprisoned
in the narrowness of this body,
but they can go out towards Christ, be illumined,
and I may not think any longer about the evil deeds of darkness
but rather about the deeds of light.
Whoever thinks about sin
is in fact trying to be encircled by his self.
Call then Your servant out.
In spite of being clutched by my sins,
in spite of being fettered and bound,
and buried amidst deadly thoughts and deeds,
if You call me I will come out free
and be one of the guests at Your banquet.
Your house will be filled with precious perfume,
if You look after the one You deigned to ransom.
(St Ambrose of Milan)

4. Contemplatio **(to contemplate the Word / silence)**

- In silence... we turn our inner sight to the One who spoke to us in the Beloved Son. May we be filled with gratitude, as we have been reached there, in the depth, in the Sheol of our humanity which may be at times wounded, hit and humiliated...

5. Collatio **(to share the Word)**

- In order for the Word to become incarnate in our very lives, let us share it with the Sisters...