

BIBLICAL PAGES

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

**Lectio n° 1
Between Shemà and intuition:
to live and to make others live**

Introduction

During this year, through the eight units of the essay, we intend to listen to the Word of God in order for the eyes of our heart to see the beauty of the person of Jesus, in His being a man who is part of a history, in a particular time, a man who is experiencing life Himself. This experience is made up of encounters, relations: the relation with the Father, first of all as St Luke reminds us (cf Lk 2:41-52); the relation with Mary and Joseph during His childhood, teenage years and up to His thirtieth year; relation with the Scriptures; relation with His milieu (how many examples in His preaching come from the agricultural world, or from daily simple chores!); relation with the suffering; relation with the joyful. Last but not least, the relation with Himself, listening to His own identity of Son who repeats all that He hears from the Father. In a word, a relation based on listening, as an attitude that may heal life in its totality; an attitude from which a way of speaking originates too.

“...What I declare to the world I have learnt from Him.” They did not recognise that He was talking to them about the Father. (Jn 8:26-27)

How does He speak concretely in His human condition? He is the One who listens to life in its happening and also to the Giver of Life. He listens and speaks as a man whose humanity is the place of communion of life with the Father but also with each and every man and woman. His humanity is the place where He welcomes us and gives us His gifts, but also the bridge that allows His communication and communion with us, and vice versa. His humanity reveals our true face, which is often hidden but longs to come to the surface, so that by being renewed and by becoming fully human like Jesus is (He is the true Man), it may allow us to enter into communion with Him.

It is interesting to note that in one of the lateral portals of Chartres Cathedral there is a sculpture representing God the Father moulding man while contemplating Christ's face. This is our identity!

Jesus listens to the Father. Being a pious Israelite, He listened to Him through the Scriptures. He heard the Shemà, the prayer that the Israelites had to recite twice a day, resounding from Joseph's voice: "Listen, Israel, the Lord is our God..." (Dt 6:4). From His childhood He was taught to listen to the God of Exodus. As an Israelite, He was brought up to listen to God's first imperative, listen! "Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people" (Lk 2:52). He was enriched by the experience of all His milieu, by the life of that community whose centre was the Torah, as the "way of life" (Dt 30:15).

And He also listened by His intuition (Rahner defined it as 'intuitive wisdom'), by that ability coming from His unique being, from being the Son. They are not two different paths; they are one in His person.

From Scripture He learnt how God acted, how God Himself listened, but He related all that to the different situations that He was experiencing as a man. It was indeed through these different situations that His listening, in His various steps as child, teenager and then grown-up man, conditioned His way of life as a Son, up to His faithfulness to the Father's face when giving the whole of His Self as well as divine life to us.

He was greatly aware that listening constituted His way of being and made of Him the Father's living communication (cf Jn 5:30; 8:26; 8:40; 15:15). His listening was inhabited by the Holy Spirit; He listened by His whole being. The Letter to the Hebrews says: "You wanted no sacrifice or cereal offering, / but You gave me a body" (Heb 10:5). This is the Septuagint version of Psalm 40:7: "You wanted no sacrifice or cereal offering, but You gave me an open ear".

Christ's ear is then His body, His humanity in relation with the Father.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit, so that He may open up the 'ear' of our heart

O Divine Spirit,
for our sails floppy or lowered by habits,
be a wind driving them to adventure and to the deep waters of life.
For us, who out of laziness are deaf to Your calling, be a powerful roar.
For us, who are used to the monotony of excuses and compromises,
be novelty, creativeness and the challenge of love.
For us, who are fearful and calculating,
be courage, O Holy Spirit, and the ability of donating ourselves without measure.
For us, who are dry bones, still and dead,
be flesh, dynamism and life,
O Spirit of God. Amen.

1. Lectio **(to read the Word / to listen to it)**

John 5:30

By myself I can do nothing;

*I can judge only as I am told to judge,
and my judging is just,
because I seek to do not my own will
but the will of Him who sent me.*

St John the evangelist makes use of a language and style different from the other evangelists'. He is not as lively as St Mark; he is not as elegant as St Luke. In practical terms his gospel does seem to be neither down-to-earth nor eventful, but rather abstract and doctrinal. A very interesting feature is that there is a recurring idea, progressively broadening upwards like a spiral. Thus, it focuses the reader's attention on the basic things, ie on mystery. We can say that repetitiveness helps him progressively deepen his theme. The terms he makes use of are peculiar to his theology, where miracles do not refer the reader to just prodigies but are rather the 'signs' pointing to a deeper reality.

This is the case of Chapter 5 too, where the passage for our Lectio comes from. In it we find a 'sign' of healing (which does not belong to the Synoptic tradition), as well as a discussion with the Jews.

Many scholars have discovered in St John's Gospel a fixed pattern, developing around the core of 'Jesus' revelation' / 'the people's reaction'. This can be defined as a 'narrative / dramatic pattern of progressive revelation'. Jesus progressively reveals Himself through 'signs' and speeches, and the onlookers react to them. But what does that mean for us, with relation to the passage quoted above?

The gospel is divided into two books: the Book of Signs (chapters 1-12) and the Book of Jesus' Hour (chapters 13-20). Chapter 5 belongs to the Book of Signs. Line 30 is part of the second diptych of revelation, to which corresponds the Jews' unbelief. Each diptych is made of two signs. Here the first one (the cure of a paralytic at the pool of Bethesda) has just been performed and the Jews have already criticized Jesus' decision to heal on the Sabbath day. A healing on the Sabbath day, the day on which each pious Jew should imitate God who rested on the seventh day from the labour of Creation, is too much, igniting a polemical discussion on both Jesus' transgression and identity. Let us examine the passage in its details.

a) "By myself I can do nothing..."

This statement can be found also at 5:19, and at Chapter 8.

5:19: "...by Himself the Son can do nothing; He can do only what He sees the Father doing."

5:30: "By myself I can do nothing, I can judge only as I am told to judge."

8:28: "I do nothing of my own accord. What I say is what the Father has taught me."

Not a single statement, then, but when the Jews' reactions become increasingly violent, Jesus reiterates it, referring it to different features of His human nature. In particular, when this phrase occurs for the first time (5:19), it is preceded by

“Amen, Amen”. ‘Amen’ is a Hebrew term deriving from ‘aman’, denoting what is solid, firm; and from the same root ‘mn’ comes ‘emet’, ‘truth’. Jesus is thus strengthening His statements, as if He were saying: “My word is firm”; “Thus it must be”.

“I can do nothing”: He is not saying that He is impotent because he is not autonomous; He is not faking humility, to hide His will of power or His vanity. In fact, Jesus’ life is not based on His own will; He does not act in order to advance His own agenda of human promotion; He acts according to His relation with the Father; and His human features are part of it. He is deeply aware that He receives everything from the Father, as He is the Son: “For the Father loves the Son and shows Him everything He Himself does” (5:20); and “the Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything to His hands” (3:35).

Jesus is not subordinated to the Father. We gather this idea from His sentence, starting the discussion: “My Father still goes on working, and I am at work too” (5:17). The Greek term used here is ‘ergazomai’, which means ‘to work’: it is used in the present tense and in an absolute sense, referred both to the Father and to the Son. That implies equality and co-ordination.

b) “I can judge only as I am told to judge.”

Jesus listens to the Father and welcomes Him (this will be reciprocal at Lazarus’ resurrection, Jn 11:41-42). This is Israel’s basic way of relating to God, that Jesus gathered from the Shemà and from Israel’s history, filtered by His filial heart. This listening becomes Light, as it is transparent to the Biblical God taking care of Israel, and offering them the choice of life (“I am offering you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then...”, Dt 30:19). This listening mirrors the God of Life. Let us not forget that the discussion here deals with the transgression of the Sabbath Day: ‘shabbat’ means rest; God is not subject to it, because He has to incessantly work to give life and to judge.

In the Talmud, in the treaty called ‘Yomà’ and devoted to the Sabbath of Sabbaths, the Feast of Kippur (Day of Expiation) has the following reading: “The Sabbath was given to you men: this entails that there are situations in which it may be profaned, by not observing its prescriptions, if it is so requested by the protection of life”.

Jesus appropriates the divine prerogative of judging, and chooses to work for life. In the very moment when, by listening to the Father, He becomes His mirror, He also becomes the ‘stumbling stone’ that makes them either welcome or reject Him. He does not judge and punish, but by His human behaviour He makes the onlooker choose: they have to choose Him as “life” (Jn 14:6); they have to make a choice “for life”. “The Father judges no one; He has entrusted all judgement to the Son”, (Jn 5:22) “because He is the Son of Man” (Jn 5:27): only because He is the Son of Man, by His humanity which is listening and which becomes transparency and communication, Jesus can judge the events and can become a stumbling stone for all those who are in front of Him and who do not welcome Him. Exactly because Jesus is faithfully listening to the Father, and by this listening He can understand His being (life) and His mission (giving life), He can act with authority, presenting the value of the God of life. St John calls ‘life’, ‘zoè’ (distinguishing it from ‘bios’): it is a life of wholeness, a life which no death is

able to destroy, a life which is given to those who listen to the Son's voice (5:25), an echo of the voice of the Father (8:26).

c) "...my judging is just, because I seek to do not my own will but the will of Him who sent me."

The core of this statement is the verb 'to seek'. In order to do the will of the Father, one has to know it first. To seek is related to Jesus' wish to be as a man in harmony with the Father.

- It is directly consequent to the listening, given that seeking has to do with Jesus' human dimension, driven by the Spirit's discernment.
- It confers quality to both listening and judging (a "just judging"), because it is a quest of the will of the Father.

Let us consider the adjective "just", then. In the Biblical world, relations are characterized by the word 'justice', as 'care of one's own and others' life', as quality that allows life for all the related subjects. In the relations with God and neighbour, one has to relate according to justice: when in a community there is someone suffering, someone poor, someone left in a corner, there can be no justice.

God, who listened to Israel's cry, demands that we listen to Him and that we, like Him, take care of the oppressed. 'Sedaqah', 'justice', means utter acceptance of God's will and uprightness towards one's neighbour (cf Ex 20:12-17). One has to listen first in order to enter a just relation with others, to seek God's will and to conform oneself to it: in a word, to be just.

In St John's Gospel, how is the Father's will described?

In Chapter 4, Jesus states: "My food is to do the will of the One who sent me, and to complete His work" (4:34). Food is a reference to Dt 8:3: "...human beings live not on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord". It is a clear reference to the fact that Yahweh makes man live by the commands that come from His mouth. His commands give life. But what is the Father's will?

"Now, the will of Him who sent me is that I should lose nothing of all that He has given to me, but that I should raise it up on the last day. It is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life and that I should raise that person up on the last day." (Jn 6:39-40)

The discussion about the Sabbath reveals Jesus as the One who has been sent (this occurs 26 times in St John's Gospel), who listens, who seeks the will of the Father, who makes the Jews come to know the spirit of the Law, who takes care of life. If God's commands give life, the just judging is fulfilled in Jesus, given that He is the One who gives life: "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full". (Jn 10:10)

2. Meditatio

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

Jesus' humanity prompts us to act. It is a calling to listen, in order to live and to make others live. When we are in front of others, we can discover our identity and

we can bring life to others. Jesus the Man prompts us to wonder whether our listening is correct, and whether it informs correctly our daily lives, our relations with others and our whole way of life.

- We must listen with all of ourselves, first of all by being women.
- We must listen in order not to be self-focussed.
- We must listen in order for our judging to be just.

Not because we must be perfect, not because we must always be in the right, not because we must excel in everything, but because we must mature in all simplicity, by listening to the Word and to the Spirit. Jesus the Man was not the only one who could listen by His intuition: we possess the Holy Spirit too!

I submit to your attention a passage by A. Louf which may help us open up to the Word of God. The Word is expecting us to listen to it and to put it into practice, so that, in a similar fashion to Jesus', we may be led to make just choices and to act taking care of the life-giving power of the Spirit in us and that He gave us so that our humanity may mature and become more and more "just" as it is in harmony with Life.

"This is the wonderful mystery of the Word of God that once again is fulfilled in our own hearts. For some time, the heart is half asleep, but the Holy Spirit of God is already there and – unknown to us – He is crying to the Father. That same Spirit is present in the Word of God who is knocking at the door of our sleepy hearts. Man's heart was made to welcome the Word... However, we must purify our hearts and get them ready, because they are foolish and slow to believe, burdened by worldly pleasures and cares... But when the Word addresses man's heart, they may acknowledge each other, all of a sudden, thanks to the Spirit who pervades them both. Sparkles come from both. A fruitful dialogue is established between the spirit half asleep in our heart and the Spirit acting in the Word. In the Word, like in a mirror, we can recognize our new face. In it we can be witnesses of our new life in Christ. 'The interior disposition of the heart' (1 Pt 3:4) is awakened in us." (taken from 'The Spirit prays in us')

3. Oratio **(to pray the Word / to repeat it)**

O God great and wonderful,
how many times in our litanies we said, 'Listen to us, Lord',
but we never wondered whether we have listened to You,
whether we have been in harmony with Your words, with Your silence.
We beseech You that You may listen to our supplication,
even if we do not care to correct our deafness, our hardened hearts.
We pray that You may understand this poor prayer of ours correctly,
and each time You hear us say: 'Listen to us, Lord',

be aware that we intend to say: ‘Open up our ears, so that we may listen to Your voice’.

Please give us a heart capable of listening to You, Father of Mercy, with Your Son and the Spirit of Love.

(Bernard Haring)

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

In silence, with no words, no reasoning, let us leave praise, amazement, gratitude come to the fore: let us be drawn into the incessant flow of Life, that Jesus’ humanity sowed on the earth, in us... Let us be drawn into communion, into the ‘special gaze’ given by the Spirit.

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

The Word gave each of us a gift of humanity to be incarnated, a gift conducive to life. Listening to God, by sharing the Word, now becomes reciprocal attention to the gift that God has given to each of us.