

# **BIBLICAL PAGES**

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

**Lectio n° 3  
Let us listen to what the events tell us,  
in order to make God's style become flesh**

## **Introduction**

In each age, in each life, there are times of transition, difficult times or times when we are stuck. Should we close our ears, waiting for them to pass, or should we try to listen to what the events tell us, and be changed by their impact on our lives?

We should listen to the rhythm, the beat of life, so that we may enter the rhythm of the style of God, and be in harmony with it.

We should listen without trying all the times to rationalize everything, but following the footsteps of a Presence that has been made flesh, the same human flesh that we have, and living in the same historical dimension we live in. Incarnation, Nativity... In all His life, Jesus had to face what is the contrary of love: if Love became flesh in the world, the contrary of love could not welcome Him. The history of the God-Man clashed with man who bore His image but who rejected Love, becoming its contrary: "Through Him all things came into being, no one thing came into being except through Him" (Jn 1:3); "He came to His own and His own people did not accept Him" (Jn 1:11).

I urge you to approach the mystery of Incarnation bearing in mind the style of littleness and simplicity of Jesus' nativity as related in St Luke's Gospel, but looking also at a passage from St Matthew's Gospel where Jesus has to face misunderstandings and rejection. Will the style of God change? Will the style of humbleness and meekness of the Verb-Baby Jesus be turned into something else? Will the predilection for the little ones as manifested at the Nativity change? What will the style of the grown-up Jesus be? Will He listen to the events with an attentive ear and an open heart, will He make a synthesis of the events, will He say something definitive about His times and about the history of His people? How will He be part of the work of the Father, waiting for His free response and co-operation? And what about us? How can we be 'listening women', trying to discover the presence of the Kingdom in our daily lives, and to enter the mystery of history and of the Word inhabiting the universe, thus discerning the shoot of new life and leaving room for Christ to be born in us?

Given that the Eternal has come into time and space as a creature that is the first to listen to and to read the signs of the times before Himself and before the Father, let us follow Jesus so that we may learn from our calling what to do, and we who have been made in His image may live our daily lives as protagonists.

### **Let us invoke the Holy Spirit**

Come, Holy Spirit,  
in me, in my heart, in my intellect,  
Give me Your intellect, so that I may know the Father  
while meditating on the words of the Gospel.  
Give me Your love, so that even today,  
prompted by Your word,  
I may look for You in the events and people that I will meet.  
Grant me Your wisdom, so that I may go through  
the events that occurred to me today,  
and I may be able to judge them in the light of Your word.  
Grant me perseverance, so that I may patiently penetrate  
into the message of God in the Gospel.

*St Thomas Aquinas*

## **1. Lectio**

**(to read the Word / to listen to it)**

### **Matthew 11:25-30**

*25 At the same time Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless You, Father, Lord of Heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to little children. 26 Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased You to do. 27 Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him.*

*28 Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'*

Let us go into the details of this passage...

This text is part of Chapter 11 of St Matthew's Gospel. This gospel may be divided into three parts, by making use of the phrase, "From then onwards, He began...", occurring in Mt 4:17 and 16:21. The phrase denotes a beginning which is different from all the rest, that is, a climax of the story.

In the first part (1:1-4:17), Jesus is portrayed as the Messiah according to the Scriptures. The second part (4:18-16:20) deals with the Messiah's deeds. The third part (16:22-28:20) with the supreme fulfilment.

The text for this Lectio belongs to the last of the four sections of the second part, relating the reactions to Jesus' works (11:2-16:20).

Chapter 11 opens with the Baptist's question: "Are You the One who is to come, or are we to expect someone else?" Immediately before that, came Jesus' reproach against the towns which had rejected Him and, earlier on, His realization that His contemporaries were willing to welcome neither St John the Baptist nor Him. The former was considered to be too rigid, the latter "a glutton and a drunkard". They were hard to please, like the children playing a game.

Chapter 12 goes on dealing with the rejection of Jesus by the Pharisees. The text of the present *Lectio* comes in-between. It is called a 'hymn of jubilation', sung in a moment of sad discoveries and of failure.

Let us analyze the text:

- a) 25 >> Introduction
- b) 25b-26 >> Prayer of thanksgiving and praise
- c) 27 >> Declaration on the Father-Son relationship
- d) 28-30 >> Invitation to follow Jesus

a)

"At the same time". 'Kairos', 'time', denotes a very important moment, occurring only once. In particular, here this term is meant to highlight the difference with the previous context: the text changes in relation to and as an answer to the previous one, thus making what follows more topical. It is a context of antithesis to Jesus' rejection, and His Person is indeed the link that prevents us from regarding the following lines as separated from the rest.

Jesus listens to the time He is immersed into, and reacts to the events: thus 'time' provides a historical setting to both the story of the God made flesh and to man's position towards Him.

"At the same time" suggests also that the keystone of the God-Man's answer to the events is hidden in what follows, the keystone of the new humankind, of a certain way of inhabiting history.

In fact, "exclaimed" is not the answer to a question, but the answer to a situation. It is a Semitic phrase, meaning "answered" and also "said".

b)

"Exomologhéō" is the first word that Jesus utters: "I give You thanks, I acknowledge You, I confess You publicly". This is a very strong statement: Jesus acknowledges the presence and the action of the Father in the events, not resignedly or as a loser would do, but with praise and thanksgiving, because He recognizes the style of the Father who reveals His Kingdom – that is, Jesus Himself – to the little ones, while those who are presumptuous are precluded any sort of knowledge.

'Népios', 'little children', means 'innocent babies', opposed to 'sophoi', 'the learned', which here does not refer to a specific group but to "this [whole] generation" (Mt 11:16), rejecting Jesus. 'Népioi' are those who do not make a show of their learning, full of prejudices that make them stiff, self-absorbed.

In the Old Testament, the term 'exomologhéō' used by St Matthew was the typical beginning of Jewish songs of praise, acknowledging and professing God as

Lord, the Saviour of man. It may also mean 'to agree'. In a way, then, Jesus the Man realizes and gives witness to the fact that history contains, 'translates' in a human language the Father's deeds of salvation. Praise originates when Jesus sees the Father's style in what is happening: who is not self-absorbed, who is not self-sufficient, can reach the core of the event and see in it the advent of Jesus' salvation ('Jesus' means 'God saves'). Jesus rejoices because the Father reveals Himself even amidst hostilities. The style that Jesus acknowledges is an event that does not come to the fore forcefully, but through daily life. This event hides God's humble love, beyond all appearances, wishing to be welcomed. As it happened at the Nativity, as it happened at the Crucifixion, beyond all appearances here there is a power hidden behind weakness. But who will be able to listen to God's whispers? The little ones will, as their ears have not yet experienced the roar of omnipotence: at the Nativity the shepherds (they were the outcast of the day, regarded as "impure"), who listened to the news of great joy to be shared by the whole people: "Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you; He is Christ the Messiah. And here is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." (Lk 2:11-12) And they hurried to see the Baby.

Which sign? The sign of a harmless Salvation, the sign of a little Saviour. Which signs shall we look for? God who makes Himself present in our daily lives, God who communicates Himself to us, God who is both far from us and by our side.

As a matter of fact, in this text – and in this text only – apart from calling the Father, 'Abba', which is a familiar appellation, Jesus calls Him 'Lord of Heaven and earth', thus proclaiming God's lordship above creation. Human history is based on His lordship, that links Heaven and earth in the Son.

'Lordship' means His free acting according to His own will: it is 'eudochia', from 'eudochéo', which denotes something done according to one's will, decision and pleasure / favour.

A pleasure / favour that can be found in Lk 2:14 in the angels' proclamation to the shepherds; and also at Jesus' baptism, when the voice of the Father declares Him to be His Beloved. The object of the Father's pleasure / favour are therefore both the Son (Mt 4:17) and men to whom He is sent (Lk 2:14), so that they may become sons in the Son.

In our text too, the Father is pleased to reveal the Son to all those who are ready to welcome Him. "Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased You to do." Jesus agrees with the favourable decision of the Father...

c)

How is it possible for the Father's will, for His favourable decision, to come true for us? The secret is in the opening up of the Father-Son relationship. History becomes the place where Love becomes man and includes men and women in His logic... if they will!

Everything has been entrusted to the Son by the Father; everything that the Father has is in the Son: this entails being One in the Other, while still being distinct Persons. And it also entails that all authority has been entrusted ('paradidostai') to the Son (cf Mt 28:18). Communion; reciprocal knowledge... Indeed, 'epiginoschen', 'mutual recognition', typical of equal persons bound by a unique

relationship. One recognizes Himself in the Other, and vice versa: One's own being is all in the Other.

In spite of all that, this unique relationship and knowledge is not kept jealously private: the Son has been entrusted the authority to reveal the Father to whomever He pleases. This implies that for both of them the meaning of 'recognition', 'equality', is 'to reveal according to eudokia'. Jesus agrees to the Father's permit. "...and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him." In order for Him to make the Father known in a genuine way, Jesus is both free and in harmony with the Father.

d)

In the passage chosen for this Lectio, we see that at first it is as if the Father were mirrored in the Son, and vice versa. Then Jesus becomes the mirror thanks to which the disciples may be made in His image.

In these lines Jesus calls to Himself all those who are aware of being overburdened. "Come to me!" His invitation includes both a promise ("I will give you rest") and a task ("Learn from me..."). The Greek term for 'rest' is 'anapausin'. This term is beautiful because it projects us towards our goal: the rest in the promised land for all those who believe, as in Heb 4:3. In the desert, Israel muttered against the Lord and against Moses (Ps 95:11), and they were not allowed to enter "the place of rest", the promised land.

However, there is a new rest, a new day, a new 'today' given to us through Jesus who, as God-Man, entered our history and is leading it towards its fulfilment. The events of history are the evolution of each of us and of everyone and of all the relationships and matter involved and transformed towards the fulfilment of the Whole Christ. Each little thing, each single event, is part of a process going forth towards its goal in Christ.

"I will give you rest". We must be an image of the Person of Jesus-the Son: He is THE rest, the goal, the fulfilment of God's promise, peace, the heritage of sonship. In the same way as God rested on the seventh day, contemplating the "very good" creation of man, so Jesus is the new rest, the New Man recreating the creature in His own image, that is, as a son.

"Learn from me..." is an unusual phrase as far as the Gospel of St Matthew is concerned. The phrase renders the Greek verb 'matetai', which comes from 'disciple', and it could be translated also "be disciples" / "learn as disciples".

If in this context Jesus says that He is "gentle and humble in heart", how is then the disciple called to listen to and to take part in events?

By making His style<sup>1</sup> come alive, by making the style of the Little One come alive: trust and harmony of Son and Father, who are both pleased of those who come, of the little ones whose life is overburdened but who nonetheless welcome Their promise of fulfilment.

It is not just 'imitation' but a calling – Jesus' free gift – to establish a relationship with His whole person, and also with His being in relation, in communion with the Father. Thus we too can learn to listen...

We wonder why the yoke and the burden are heavy. The yoke should distribute the burden equally, the efforts in a proportionate way for the job to be done more

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<sup>1</sup> In the Bible, 'heart' denotes a fully aware, clever, free personality, the core where decisions are taken.

easily, for the energies to be channelled towards the good. In the Scriptures, the yoke is the Law, the way allowing us to live well. Why then is the yoke heavy? Because it has become an external norm, incapable of showing the face of the Father. Jesus has come to fulfil the Law, ie to show the Father's true will, hidden in the Torah. He has come not to abolish the Law, but to show us the original will of the Father (Mt 5:17).

Thus His yoke may be light ('chrestòs', 'sweet', but also 'helpful'): by revealing the Father, it frees us from the burden of a God we should be subject to in fear, overburdened by His many precepts, from the burden of a God dwelling far away and not caring for us, from the burden of thinking that our own natural fragility, our own painful efforts, are just the burden of "this material world".

The yoke is light if we experience being looked at with love in each and every situation and we decide to trust in that love. In the passage of our Lectio, Jesus is experiencing that; He wants us to have a share in that, in Him.

St Matthew makes use of Jesus' hymn of jubilation to signify that now the outlook on the events has changed: the core of this outlook is the loving Father, as well as the Son's trust and obedience. He shares the Father's will for good, and He shares our own history from within, assuming and transfiguring it. The goal is to lead us to the fulfilment of our lives, by pointing to the dimension of littleness and simplicity typical of children, and to the Meek One who trusts in God and does not need defensive walls.

There is an invitation, but also an 'obedience' for us. Obedience comes from the Latin 'ob-audire', 'to listen attentively'. We must therefore listen to history as daughters in order to live with a Father; we must become better daughters and have rest in trust, in faith in Jesus (Rv 14:11). Men and women are at the centre of God's plan of revelation: we are unaware that the love of the Father and of the Son who go out of Themselves is in fact addressed to us.

## **2. Meditatio**

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

- Which attitudes should I cultivate in order to be able to 'ob-audire' my own history?
- From the Baby Jesus' humbleness to the meekness of the grown-up Jesus: a human path of growth in trust – in the awareness of His identity as Son of God – through actual history. Where am I on that path?
- Humbleness and meekness regarded not as moral virtues but as existential attitudes, that is, willingness and ability to listen, to be part of revelation and be a protagonist of the events. Be part of the group of the 'little ones'.
- Praise as a response to the Father's pleasure: to acknowledge God's free acting and to be in harmony with Christ and acting with Him.

Jesus' humanity prompts us to live in poverty and obedience in our daily lives and history. Obedience does not mean to be resigned to events but to co-operate creatively with God's work in the world, through one's own history, in order to come all together to the fullness of Christ, the place of "Rest".

I invite you to re-read numbers 16-21-23 of the Rule of Life, while listening to Jesus. I think it may be an occasion to joyfully give praise for being guided by the Spirit to be part of a historical response, ie Regnum Mariae.

Here I reproduce a text by Card. Carlo Maria Martini, as it seems to me to be in harmony especially with the dimension of union-freedom according to n° 21 of the Rule, as well as with Jesus' very own listening-freedom.

*“God does not educate us by chance, that is, every now and then, through disconnected deeds... In the Scriptures we find pages that evoke, recall, describe God’s dream, the goal of divine action in history. It is to make us ‘holy and faultless before Him in love... to the praise of the glory of His grace... to bring everything together under Christ as head, everything in Heaven and everything on earth.’ (Eph 1:5-10)*

*God’s plan frees us. The discovery of genuine freedom is of paramount importance for the growth of the person, as well as of a community of people. The path God makes man tread, makes him experience genuine freedom. God makes His people go out (exodus) of the land of slavery and enter the land of freedom... ‘What does ‘freedom’ mean? To be able to make use of freedom in truth’. (John Paul II, ‘Letter to the young men and women of the world’, 1985) This ‘truth’ is the divine plan of salvation. You are free if you welcome God’s plan in all trust; if you are aware and accept that your life has been given to you as a gift; if you are aware that God loves you and calls you to be fulfilled following in the footsteps of Jesus, the perfect Man. You are free if you are not a slave of pride, if you are not possessed by riches and by the obsession to consume goods, if you do not need subjects to feel important, if you are not afraid of taking your responsibilities. The opposite is to be afraid of freedom, to renounce freedom. Only God, the true educator, will lead us to genuine freedom.”*

(from the Pastoral Letter ‘Only Truth May Make You Free’)

### **3. Oratio**

**(to pray the Word / to repeat it)**

Christ, You always do what is pleasing to the Father:  
grant us that we may obey with joy and with the freedom of children.  
Teach us a trustful prayer,  
which may not be discouraged,  
which may long for the coming of the Kingdom  
with its justice and liberty.  
Lord Jesus, who give us rest,  
teach us to find rest in You.  
Enlighten our gaze by the brightness of Your Gospel.  
You are our salvation,  
You are the dawn of joy:  
fulfil our expectations,  
renew our lives.

Pierre Griolet

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

Let us rest in praise and trust, welcoming the advent of God in our history. Let us taste 'littleness'.

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

Let us share our praise – in a spirit of sorority – following Jesus: “I bless You, Father” for...