

# **BIBLICAL PAGES**

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

### **Lectio n° 7 To speak openly**

#### **Introduction**

‘Parresia’: this term literally comes from ‘pan’, that is, ‘everything’, and ‘resis’, ‘discourse’; its meaning is therefore ‘to speak openly’.

But about what? Not definitely about the first idea that comes into one’s mind, not certainly about commonplaces or trivial things. In the same way, it must not be taken for granted that one’s plain language is immediately understood by the listeners. How, then, should one speak openly?

The ancient believed that to express one’s views openly as well as to be loyal concerning the truth that one had to acknowledge, was both a right and a responsibility.

More than once in his Gospel St John relates that Jesus “spoke openly”, “with parresia”. But what did that mean in actual terms? What did His listeners actually grasp of His speeches? And what does ‘parresia’ mean for us today?

In the fourth gospel, Jesus’ speeches are not made up of ‘loghia’, ‘sayings’, but are elaborate and coherent speeches of revelation. In particular, His revelation speeches are literary rendered as dialogues: in St John’s Gospel we really hear Jesus speaking.

Now, let us focus on Jesus’ speech that immediately precedes Easter, as the ‘key’ to enter the dyad ‘to reveal-not to reveal’ which is typical of St John’s Gospel.

Jesus’ dialogue tells many more things than those which are said openly; and involves both the narrator and the reader into the decision ‘for’ or ‘against’ the person of Jesus.

We are bound to wonder whether we have really grasped the real and full meaning of the text... In fact, we do find in it always new hints, new meanings and so on...

Thus, by reading and re-reading the text many times, by being in accord with its language, by regarding it in the light of the Holy Spirit, we can start walking on the path that leads to ‘parresia’.

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

*Holy Spirit, if You don't mould us interiorly  
and if we do not have recourse to You very often,  
we may perhaps be following Jesus Christ  
but definitely not in harmony with His heart.  
You are the only One who can make us fit  
in our inner selves for the Gospel of Jesus,  
and make us able to proclaim it by our very lives.  
Pour Yourself into our lives  
and act in them freely.  
Penetrate into the bark that still is not completely Yours.  
Purify our thoughts  
from what makes them muddy;  
test in advance our words  
and make them savoury by Your salt and oil.  
Mould in us a new, passionate heart,  
that conveys love.  
You, who never rest and never rest content,  
do not come in us to rest!  
(Madeleine Delbrel)*

## **1. Lectio**

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

### **John 16:25-32**

*25 'I have been telling you these things in veiled language. The hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in veiled language but tell you about the Father in plain words. 26 When that day comes you will ask in my name; and I do not say that I shall pray to the Father for you, 27 because the Father Himself loves you for loving me, and believing that I came from God. 28 I came from the Father and have come into the world and now I am leaving the world to go to the Father.'*

*29 His disciples said, 'Now You are speaking plainly and not using veiled language. 30 Now we see that You know everything and need not wait for questions to be put into words; because of this we believe that You came from God.'*

*31 Jesus answered them: 'Do you believe at last? 32 Listen; the time will come – indeed it has come already – when you are going to be scattered, each going his own way and leaving me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.'*

### **John 18:20-21**

*20 Jesus answered the High Priest, 'I have spoken openly for all the world to hear; I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple where all the Jews met together; I have said nothing in secret. 21 Why ask me? Ask my hearers what I taught; they know what I said.'*

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Let us read the texts...

Both passages come from the second part of St John's Gospel, 'The Book of Jesus' Hour' (Chapters 13-20). The first passage (from Chapter 16) is part of Jesus' ultimate revelation to His disciples during the Last Supper (Chapters 13-17) and, more specifically, is part of Jesus' farewell discourse (13:31-16:33) or 'testament'. The 'testament' is a literary genre commonly used in Old Testament times. Instances of this are Jacob's farewell discourse (Gn 49), Moses' (Dt 38); and some apocryphal writings such as 'The Book of the Jubilees' or 'The testament of the Twelve Patriarchs'.

A very important character, before he dies, has to pass on his last recommendations to his sons or grand-sons that he is about to leave. Thus, from the beginning of Chapter 13, after sending away him who would betray Him, Jesus speaks to His own, as they are His close friends, the ones He wants to entrust His last teachings to.

The second passage (from Chapter 18) is part of the Passion narrative, precisely of Jesus' religious process before the Sanhedrin: the High Priest is questioning Jesus about His disciples and teachings.

Let us analyze the text from Chapter 16:

- a) 25-26 Two periods of time
- b) 27-28 The object of Revelation
- c) 29-30 The disciples' answer
- d) 31-32 The announcement of incomprehension

### **a) Two periods of time**

In these lines we see an important shift between two periods of time: the present and the future, highlighted and characterized by Jesus thanks to two key words:

<i>time</i>	<i>key word</i>
I have been telling you	in veiled words ('paroimia')
The hour is coming When that day comes	openly ('parresia')

There was a time when Jesus spoke with similitudes ('paroimia'), as in the case of the shepherd and the vine. There will be a time when He will speak – or, better, when He will proclaim ('apaggelò') – the truth about the Father. The term 'paroimia' translates the Hebrew 'mashàl', which means 'example', 'similitude', 'riddle'. It occurs in Jn 10:6 which deals with the Shepherd, the sheep and the flock: the Jews did not understand what Jesus was talking about.

In 16:12 Jesus has still many things to tell His disciples, but He is aware that they are not ready to bear them.

In the passage we are focussing on at the moment, exactly as in 16:12, we find Jesus' realization that His disciples are not able to fully grasp the meaning of His speech. They regard it as an enigma. However, it is vital for Him to make it anyway, so that they may understand everything later on. The verb 'apaggelò' of line 25 is a verb of revelation (4:25), exactly as that used in 16:13b with reference to the Spirit who will proclaim ('ananghellein') the things to come, and may be used also in relation with "to proclaim what one has heard".

Jesus speaks of what He has heard from the Father (cf 8:26), and He therefore proclaims and reveals it. "However, when the Spirit of truth comes He will lead you to the complete truth, since He will not be speaking of His own accord, but will say only what He has been told; and He will reveal to you the things to come." (16:13)

We can say then that in this passage the 'parresia' corresponds to the time of the Holy Spirit: in St John's Gospel the disciples and everybody else will receive the Spirit thanks to Christ's glorification on the cross. In fact, in St John's Gospel death, ascension and outpouring of the Spirit converge towards one single point.

"The hour", "that day", is the time when the Spirit will guide – or as the Greek text says, 'lead' – to the whole truth. The verb 'odoghein', 'to lead', means 'to make way' ('odos', 'way'; 'ago', 'to make'). The Spirit will teach us about the full understanding of Jesus and His message, as well as about the things to come. What are "the things to come"? How can "that day", the day of open speech, be acknowledged?

It is the time when history will be interpreted in the light of Jesus' historical life, which is an anticipation of the future of each and every history. It is the time when the Word's answer, that has become history, once and for all will be revealed to each and every of the different historical contexts: to speak openly becomes a revelation that love and gratuitousness are victorious; that truth is the Person of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen; that we must interpret the present times in the light of what Christ's historical life anticipates of the future, in the light of that fulfilment of the whole "Jesus-Christ-event" that the disciples were really unable to grasp at that stage.

How come then, in Chapter 18:20, Jesus states before Annas the High Priest that He spoke openly? How should we interpret those two texts, apparently contradicting each other?

Jesus states that He spoke openly, that He taught in the Temple, that He said nothing in secret (18:20). The Temple, together with Jerusalem, was the centre of Judaea where all the Jews had to converge. We gather from that that Jesus' message was 'public'. And that "to speak openly" was the universal mission of the Verb made flesh, who did not speak to an elite but came to enlighten each and every man, the whole world (cf Jn 1:9; 3:16-17). "When that day comes" (16:26), there will be no need for Jesus to pray to the Father any longer, given that the disciples will ask in His name. The name is linked to the historical person of Jesus. To the Hebrew mindset the name and the essence of the person, as well as his nature, power and activity, coincided: to know the name meant to know the person. "To ask in one's name" means to ask thanks to one's knowledge of that

person, which in a biblical sense is an existential experience of union and co-penetration.

In Chapter 14:16-17 we find Jesus' prayer to the Father for Him to send the Holy Spirit Paraclete, who will be with His disciples, in His disciples.

Then, we can infer that what our text says at line 26 refers to the fact that "that day", when the Spirit has already been poured down on the disciples, they will ask, yes, but being one with Jesus.

### **b) The object of revelation**

Line 27 goes back to the present time: in fact, the Father already loves them. The core of lines 27-28 is sticking to Jesus: there is a correspondence between loving Jesus and being loved by the Father.

I'd like to highlight the verb 'filèi', 'to love'. It refers to the love typical of friends, a kind of love suitable to the disciples.

The verb 'agapào', 'to love', is used by St John to refer to that love by which Jesus prays to the Father in the great priestly prayer of Chapter 17: "...that the love with which You loved me may be in them, and so that I may be in them." (17:26)

In Chapter 21 the two verbs ('filèi' and 'agapào') will be intertwined in the dialogue between Jesus and St Peter on the shore of Tiberias after the resurrection, when Jesus will ask twice, 'Do you love me?', making use of the verb 'agapào'; and St Peter, who has disowned Him, will make use of the verb 'filèi'; finally, Jesus will ask 'Do you love me?' making use of the verb 'filèi', thus acknowledging St Peter's limited response.

Going back to line 27, we could say that the Father's love adapts itself to the disciples' actual ability to love and stick to Jesus, and is therefore 'filèi'. They believed that He came from the Father. The object of revelation, what was at stake here, was indeed Jesus' coming from the Father and returning to Him. It is the same theme of the beginning of Chapter 13. The meaning of Jesus' life is to come out from the Father in order to recapitulate in His flesh each and every flesh, and to take back mankind into the relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which is a circle of love ('agapào'). The summit is to love up to the end, to be faithful to being a gift, always and everywhere, even when one is faced by hate and death; to being a gift that communicates the divine life, the Spirit, the promised 'agapào'.

St John is the only one among the evangelists who coins a new phrase to refer to Jesus' breathing His last, 'parédoken tò pneuma'. This phrase has a twofold meaning: it means both Jesus' human breathing His last and Jesus' giving back the Holy Spirit to the Father.

### **c) The disciples' answer**

The disciples believed they had fully grasped everything. The two words highlighted at the beginning ('paroimia', 'in veiled words'; and 'parresia', 'to speak openly') occur once again in line 29. Once again we get also the verb 'to believe'. Now it is clear that the disciples are equivocating, when they believe that the time of the open speech may be anticipated. They believe, but the text hints to the fact that their belief is proportionate to how much / how little they are able to believe, in the "here and now".

Belief, as a way to salvation, is the main theme of the fourth gospel from its very beginning (1:12). The verb 'to believe' occurs 98 times altogether and refers to a path on which man has to walk along during all his life. This path clashes with the scandal of the Incarnation. And this is the reason why in St John's Gospel faith can always increase: it is dynamic and progressive, but it has also to come to terms with human shortcomings and passions. It is a personal adherence to Jesus even though it is subject to misunderstandings and incomprehension. The disciples believe, yes, and they welcome His word as truth which does not need further testimonies (1. 30), but they cannot assume that they fully understand. However, they grasp that He relates – repeating faithfully, therefore, openly – what He hears from the Father, with no similitudes. In fact, Jesus never renounces to give His word as an abundant gift, as a sower who is not afraid of wasting seeds; but He is also superabundant, knowing that everything will be reminded to them by the Holy Spirit later on.

#### **d) The announcement of incomprehension**

Jesus is aware that in spite of adhesion to Him, belief is put to the test by reality, and that His own disciples are not ready yet. In these lines irony, which is one of St John's Gospel's features, comes to the fore. Irony originates from the difference between what is said and how those words are put into practice, and from what the actual behaviours reveal.

Jesus makes use of irony when He responds to the disciples' statements. In Jn 13:36, Jesus tells St Peter that he will not be able to follow Him, only later on He will do it. St Peter replies by asking why not in that moment: "I will lay down my life for You". Then Jesus forewarns him about his future denial. Only in Chapter 21, after the resurrection and Jesus' breathing of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, and after assuring Jesus of his love three times (the opposite of his three denials during Jesus' Passion), will St Peter be allowed to follow Jesus: "Follow me".

"Listen; the time will come – indeed it has come already – when you are going to be scattered, each going his own way and leaving me alone." Here Jesus forewarns the disciples of their flight in the hour of His passion... Here He makes use of irony too.

As He proclaimed in 18:20, Jesus spoke openly for all the world to hear, He said nothing in secret, and everybody can repeat what He said (18:21). However, the drama of incomprehension is part of reality, looking forward to the guiding of the Holy Spirit.

## **2. Meditatio**

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

How do those texts provoke us?

- Jesus gave us the word; the Holy Spirit makes us comprehend that word more and more deeply. And we can grasp what we had previously just learnt by heart: it is not a matter of more or less doctrine but of growth in understanding.

- Jesus' parrhesia may be fulfilled in us if we open up to the Holy Spirit, and we are ready to follow the way of the Word "here and now", and we are ready to welcome what God – not we – thinks it is necessary to our own personal condition. We should not pretend to know more than what we are given in that specific moment. In a word, we must be humble.

- Our open speech is but a consequence of the understanding we have received from the Spirit, who gives witness in us about Jesus and makes us proclaimers of the truth about Jesus (15:27). We must be 'audacious'. Please read n° 4 from the Rule of Life, keeping in mind the following words by Sergej Bulgakov:

“The idea of a Church called to preach to all nations implies – on our part – an active, responsible and creative attitude towards life. If humility and audacity are well balanced, the former will be nourished by the latter, and the latter will fulfil the former.

On the contrary, audacity with no humility will turn into self-assertion, caring for its own advantage, and therefore it will be foreign to Christian love; Christian love will not be its rule.

One could say that if humility is our love for God, audacity is our love for the world and for man: the second commandment similar to the first, two wings lifting up the human spirit...

There must be audacity in humility and humility in audacity, which is inseparable from one's own responsibilities. The two ways do not oppose each other and can therefore be united. In fact, pride is opposed to humility, and slavery and legalism to audacity: these are really incompatible.”

Given that we are all involved in the present dramatic conditions of mankind, we cannot ignore the disease, isolation, death: how should we live up to the parrhesia? We should not say 'many things', but rather give witness to "the things to come" that the Holy Spirit is telling us: that in both life and death the future is one, that we can see anticipated in the fulfilment of Jesus' life. Now, in this historical situation, led by the Spirit, being down-to-earth and with no fake optimism, we can say with parrhesia that the whole of Jesus' life is parrhesia to the world. Today we can proclaim the ultimate end of our path, even welcoming sorrows and human bewilderment because we, compared to the disciples in that evening, are more knowledgeable: we know its fulfilment, resurrection of life and never-ending communion.

### **3. Oratio**

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

Holy Spirit Paraclete,  
perfect in us the work started by Jesus,  
make our prayer strong and incessant,  
the prayer on behalf of the whole world;  
make our inner life deeper and deeper  
as fast as You can;

make our apostolate effective,  
given that it would like to reach  
all men and all peoples.  
May the immense spaces of charity  
never be limited by our own interests,  
by our petty and short-sighted selfishness,  
but may everything be in harmony  
with the last prayer of the Son to the Father  
and with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit of Love,  
willed by the Father and the Son for the whole Church,  
the institutions,  
men and women and peoples.  
(St John XXIII)

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

Let us be guided by the Spirit of Christ, so that we may enter the dimension of wisdom, letting us see and enjoy reality beyond appearances. Let us keep giving praise for each and every gesture and word given by Jesus to us, as well as to the whole world, still growing in history.

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

In the communion of the Holy Spirit, let us tell one another if and how Jesus' word has become 'parresia' in our selves and let us give witness about that.