

BIBLICAL PAGES

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

**Lectio n° 8
We are proclaimers,
sent by the Word**

Introduction

This is our last Lectio dealing with Jesus speaking to us. All the things that He said, all the ways in which He said them, reach out to all the different nuances of our own humanity, and render Him to our eyes as the trustworthy image of a fulfilled man.

If we had to summarize His legacy to us all, we should take into consideration His appearance to the Eleven in Galilee, after His resurrection. Galilee was the place where some fishermen who were washing their nets started to listen to Him, and it is the very place where He gives them His last word which will be their mission, a word which they will have to make fruitful.

These are Jesus' last words... He sends them into the world with a Word that will have to spread among all peoples. This Word resounds with all the events that Jesus shared with His own: they will communicate their experience, which passed also through the phases of puzzlement and bewilderment and wonder.

Now we stand next to the disciples so that we may listen to Him talking, look at Him as an example, and we may learn how to proclaim – as His envoys – the good news that He will be with us for ever.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit

The bright choirs of the angels
unceasingly sing in Heaven the glory of the Holy Spirit,
source of life and of immaterial glory.

We also glorify You with them, Spirit of goodness,
for all Your favours manifest and hidden,
and humbly we beseech You to cover us
with Your blessed shadow:

Come, true light and joy of the soul.

Come, cloud bringing dew and inexpressible beauty.

Come to accept our praise as fragrant incense.
Come, Spirit of truth, which the world cannot receive.
Come to make us taste the happiness of Your outpouring.
Come to gladden us with the abundance of Your gifts.
Come eternal sun and without setting to establish Your abode in us.
Holy Spirit Paraclete, come and dwell in us.
(Akathist Hymn to the Holy and Life-Giving Spirit, Stanza 1)

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

Matthew 28:16-20

16 Meanwhile the eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. 17 When they saw Him they fell down before Him, though some hesitated. 18 Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore, and make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'

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Let us read the texts...

This is the conclusion of the Gospel of St Matthew. The Risen Jesus gives His last words to the disciples, so that they may pass them on from generation to generation.

This text, because of both its position in the book and its contents, is regarded as the theological key to the whole Gospel of St Matthew. It also allows us to understand His Church and how we Christians should behave: the praxis qualifying the work of the Church is the genuine response to the presence of the Lord "in our midst". The sending of the disciples links mission and praxis; it is through the latter that we can understand God's will.

Let us analyze the text:

- a) 16-17 Narrative section
- b) 18 Jesus' self-proclamation
- c) 19-20 The missionary mandate

a) 16-17 Narrative section

In these first lines the Eleven are the protagonists. They deal with discipleship, and with the behaviour of those who have shared Jesus' life and who have been convoked.

At the end of his Gospel, the evangelist highlights the Eleven as an example for all those who, after being bewildered, welcome the new event (the Resurrection) which occurred to the One they had already followed for so long. After listening

to the words proclaimed by the women, they set out and went to the place Jesus had arranged to meet them in, so that they can “see” Jesus: “...they must leave for Galilee; there they will see me.” (28:10) This proclamation is similar to the one Jesus made before His passion: “...but after my resurrection, I shall go ahead of you to Galilee” (26:32), immediately after quoting Zk 13:7: “I shall strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered”.

After being scandalized and being scattered, they gather together as disciples once again, as they welcome once again the Word and the Event.

Now, let us stop to consider the verb ‘to see’, which appears to be the immediate goal of the convocation. In the text which precedes ours an evolution can be detected:

- Mary Magdalene and the other Mary go to “see” the tomb. The verb used here is ‘theoreo’, which means ‘to look at’.
- The angel proclaims that Jesus is risen and invites them to see the tomb. The Greek verb used here is ‘idete’, that is, the aorist tense of ‘horao’, which highlights the seeing-learning of that precise moment.
- The angel sends them to proclaim the good news to the disciple, and that they have to go to Galilee, as the Risen Jesus is preceding them, and there they will be able to see Him. Here the Greek verb used is ‘opseste’, which is the future indicative of ‘horao’: ‘to learn-experiment’, now and in the future.
- This last term is the same that Jesus made use of when He sent the women.

In line 17 the term is ‘idontes’, ‘when they saw Him’. This gaze implies a deep perception of reality, given that it is the verb ‘horao’ in its aorist tense.

If we focus on the simple outline of the narration, we will see three verbs describing the disciples’ actions: to go, to prostrate, to hesitate. “They went”: the verb used is ‘eporethesan’, which may also mean ‘to go on with the journey’. The two following verbs occur also in Mt 14:28-33, when St Peter asks Jesus to bid him walk on the waters, he doubts and then, once he is back on the boat, he bows down before Jesus together with the other men, acknowledging Him as the Son of God.

Going back to our text, I think St Matthew wants to highlight the simultaneous presence of faith and doubts in the disciples: to prostrate oneself is a sign that one is worshipping someone, but one of the features of the disciples is also the little faith, not allowing them to fully recognize the presence of the Lord in their midst. We, in our turn, must take the lead from the disciples’ example in order to overcome our doubts and fears.

As we have already said, the verb ‘to see’ renders the verb ‘idontes’ (aorist tense) which stresses the relevance of the action in the present. It is like a stroke of the brush, a precise action seen as it is happening, it is not a continuous action.

Therefore, the true reason why Jesus convoked them shifts from seeing Jesus to listening to Jesus, ie the mission they are about to receive. They have been convoked in the ‘setting’ of a journey which is going on, which started in Galilee. That place, however, is much more than the starting point of their journey to follow Jesus. It is linked to Mt 4:15, where the prophet Isaiah is quoted, calling

Galilee “Galilee of the nations”. We can guess therefore that, from the very first chapters, Galilee is destined to become the place of irradiation of the proclamation to all peoples, which is now being fulfilled. The mountain, which traditionally is the place of the encounter with God (cf Moses, Elijah), here refers to the mount of the Beatitudes and, even much more, to the mount of Transfiguration.

In fact, especially because these lines are the theological key allowing us to understand the whole gospel, they show the fulfilment of the promise, of that glory shown (just for a moment) to the three disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration.

b) 18 Jesus’ self-proclamation

As in the Transfiguration text, here Jesus “comes up” to the prostrated disciples: this is a bridge to the second ‘scene’, focussed on Jesus’ speech. Jesus proclaims Himself: by now His glorification associates Him to the full power of the Father (let us recall to mind Jesus’ cry of jubilation in 11:25, where He calls Him ‘Lord of Heaven and earth’). Power, ‘exousia’, comes from the Father who is Lord of Heaven and earth. The passive verb (“has been given”) is a theological passive, given that it was the Father who established the eschatological mission of the Son. In this line we find the fulfilment of the mission: the stress here is different from what we find in 11:25. There the ‘exousia’ is the basis of Jesus’ revelation of the Father; here, instead, the power of love and majesty conferred on Jesus by His glorification is shared between Father and Son, and that is the reason why Jesus is able to confer full powers to His disciples too.

This universal power (including Heaven and earth) of the Risen Jesus (who is defined by the text neither ‘Kyrios’, nor ‘Christos’, but simply ‘Jesus’), as highlighted in this text, belongs to the historical Jesus, that by His life and commands remains the reference point for all those who shared their lives with Him.

c) 19-20 The missionary mandate

Jesus goes on talking: He confers them the mandate which is directly linked to His universal ‘exousia’. These words mark both a fulfilment and a new beginning: the verb He makes use for to say “Go!” is once again ‘poreutentes’. The journey goes on, even though now its scope is revealed in its fullness... that is, ‘to make disciples’. Here the evangelist does not use the verb ‘to proclaim’ but rather ‘to make disciples’, a term which we have already seen in 11:29. The focus and the scope of mission are: to be disciples, to adhere to Jesus, to have His person and His faithfulness to the Father as the basis of one’s own words and deeds. The addressees of this mission are all nations.

Here we find two perspectives, apparently contrasting each other: to be sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (cf 10:6; 15:24) and to be sent to all nations. But is it one really opposed to the other and vice versa?

We must take note that the latter is already present at the very beginning of the gospel, in Jesus’ genealogy (1:1-17); and, as far as the former is concerned,

Isaiah's prophecy of universality (4:15) here finds its ultimate fulfilment. But how? Through the mandate conferred in His own time and space to His eleven hesitating disciples by Jesus of Nazareth, a Jewish man, dead and Risen as the Man-God in whom all the life and power of love of the Father can be communicated to all. The mandate that Jesus confers, receives its power from the Father who, after immersing Him into death has called Him back to life thanks to the power of love of the Holy Spirit. Its power lies in the fulfilment of Jesus' paschal event, in which the whole Trinity is at work. And 'to make disciples', therefore, means to immerse men and women in the divine life, where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are at work. It is like being grafted on the everlasting communication of Trinitarian love thanks to the Spirit of the Risen One.

In addition to that, there is another specific task: to teach men to observe all that Jesus commanded them. 'To observe', 'terein', means also 'to care for'. From a theological point of view there is a reference to the 'entolon' of 5:19, "even the least of the commandments", because "he who keeps them and teaches them will be considered great in the kingdom of Heaven".

In fact, Jesus did not come to abolish the commandments, but to fulfil them, to restore them to the original meaning in harmony with the Father's mind. To teach is therefore linked with deeds in harmony with Jesus' commandments, with the Father's mind, with the deeds of Jesus who reveals the Father.

We can say that in St Matthew's Gospel the Church is the place characterized by deeds in harmony with the will of the Father; the Church is based on the 'imitatio Dei', as a family gathered by Him: the core of the Sermon of the Mount is the 'Our Father' (6:9) and the conclusive exhortation of Chapter 5 is to be perfect as the Father is perfect, as He sends down rain to fall on the upright and the wicked alike (5:48). It is the new standard of uprightness that we find in 5:20, founded on the unity between teaching and observing, that is, between what one says and what one does.

The mandate hints to a 'care' that the disciples must have for their addressees while they communicate the good news to them. They must care for the transmission of Jesus' behaviour, they must be responsible for the brother or sister, for the "little ones" (10:42), thus imitating the Father's care as revealed by the Son.

Thus the Trinitarian aspect of the mandate is not an absolute novelty, but it highlights the hints already present in the rest of the Gospel to the fact that all of Jesus' behaviour is in the Spirit. St Matthew stresses the presence of the Holy Spirit from the Annunciation, then at Baptism, when Jesus is tested in the desert, when His deeds are fulfilled. It is the Spirit who gives the right words to the disciples sent in Chapter 10:20. This reference to the immersion in the Trinity fulfils the themes contained in the Gospel of St Matthew, themes which characterized the historical life of Jesus Christ and will inform the disciples' ones as well.

"I am with you..." of line 20 recapitulates and fulfils what was said in 1:23 about the Emmanuel, "God-with-us". This is a quote from Isaiah's prophecy (Is 7:14), and at the end of the Gospel we see the fulfilment of Scripture: the Risen One assures His disciples and us all of His presence every day, "to the end of time", as He is the God-with-us.

One of St Matthew's features is indeed giving, when people are hesitating or doubtful, not additional visions or signs (like St Luke does at Chapter 24), but rather the promise of a Presence that we must discover day by day in our daily chores and difficulties.

In conclusion, vision is not decisive; what really counts is the Word our faith must be based on. It is by discipleship, by observing the commandments, by communicating the historical life of Jesus Christ who communicates the Father's deeds thanks to the Holy Spirit, by making that life and deeds be 'alive' even today, that the Risen One will remain in our midst as the sacrament of the Presence of God up to the end of time, when God will be all in all.

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

The mandate must be at the heart of our vocation and mission: to receive, to welcome, so that we may be proclaimers, not just by words, but by deeds.

To receive the Word / the Promise: do I perceive the presence of the God-with-us?

To welcome the Presence, His way of relating to the Father in the Holy Spirit: my basic everyday life can be immersed in the Trinitarian relationship.

Care, responsibility, maternity and sorority must be permanent features of our discipleship. Our way of life must communicate the reciprocal care among the three Persons of the Trinity, who are perennially in communion and communicating one to the other, as well as communicating outwardly. What does all that involve for us?

Let us re-read nn° 1, 7 and 41 of the Rule of Life, committing us to be rooted in the Trinitarian life we have been introduced into by Baptism, put into practice by following Jesus and observing His commandments in a Marian way, as a family gathered together by God.

Let us fix our gaze on Mary. Who can be better than her in being the woman-disciple in a relationship with the Trinity and communicating God? All her life was not a discourse about God, but wondering and meditating and finding a responsible answer to the Word which was addressed to her. By responding, she could communicate God.

We could say that each and every of Mary's obedient responses 'obliged' God to reveal Himself as Trinity, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This was what He was waiting for: a human creature who would respond to Him in utter freedom and who would give Him the possibility to communicate, to have access to history.

The following passages can widen our horizon:

"God gives us as a gift a concrete vision of the Trinitarian life in grace and when we are committed to imitating Christ. Vision is just the inner

enlightenment deriving from the obedience paid with Christ to the Father in the Spirit. Our first and foremost model is Mary... in the care and imitation of the Son, by storing up all His words in her heart, she will penetrate deeper and deeper into the intelligence of the Trinity: of the Father, whose daughter she is; of the Son, whose mother and spiritual bride she is; of the Holy Spirit, whose recipient she is. Not different from her must be the Church as a whole, of which she is THE model. She does not devote herself to speculations, but she worships and obeys. She opens up her womb to the Holy Spirit and is giving birth to the Son all the time, up to the end of the world: His members, His brothers and sisters. She is the woman in whom the Trinitarian life is fulfilled; the woman who by her very existence makes the divine mystery be revealed and clarified. The obedience of the Christians... is the 'medium' through which God manifests Himself as Trinity." (H.U. von Balthasar)

"The journey of faith of the Mother of the Lord proceeds in relation to Christ... If it is true that the fulfilled event of Christ is the Trinity's revelation, it is also true that, consequently, Mary's faith constitutes the living archetype of hospitality. And the apostolic Church is called to welcome that Revelation and, in strict conjunction with it, the revelation occurring in all times, so that she may become not only a proclaimer but, in Christ Himself, a sacrament for the whole of humanity." (Piero Coda)

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

“St Mary, missionary woman, grant your Church the joy of rediscovering, hidden between the turfs of the verb ‘to send’, the roots of her primordial vocation.

Help her to have Jesus Christ as her standard, and nobody else: like you who, appearing at the very beginning of the New Testament revelation next to Him, the great Missionary of God, chose Him as the one and only standard of your life.

“When the Church is lingering within her tents, which cannot be reached by the cry of the poor, give her the courage to go out of the camp. When she is tempted to petrify the mobility of her address, get rid of her apparent certainties. When she rests on her successes, shake her from her sedentary life. Sent by God for the salvation of the world, the Church has been made to walk, not to sit down.

“Given that she is a nomad like you, kindle in her heart a great passion for man. Itinerant mother like you, fill her with tenderness for all the poor and needy. And make her care for nothing but to present Jesus Christ, like you did with the shepherds, with Simeon, with the Magi from the East, and with many many others who were waiting for redemption.

“St Mary, missionary woman, make our Christian life strong with that courage and zeal that brought you, life-giver, on the roads of Palestine. Urn of the Holy Spirit, pour His chrism upon us, so that He may instil in our heart the longing for “all nations”. And even if life binds us to the meridians and parallels where we were born, make us feel the need of the multitudes that still do not know Christ.

“Open up our eyes so that we may see the sorrows of the world. Do not prevent us from being shaken in our tranquillity by the cry of the poor. You, who in Elizabeth’s house proclaimed the most beautiful song of liberation theology, inspire in us the audacity of the prophets. Make the words of hope on our lips resound as truthful...” (Fr Tonino Bello)

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

In all simplicity, like Mary, in silence, let us stand in front of the Presence who lives within us and who at the same time is around us, feeling that we are daughters, brides , recipients.

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

The resonance of this last retreat may be the occasion to communicate one to the other that specific little ‘mandate’ that each of us has discerned for herself in prayer.