

BIBLICAL PAGES

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

Lectio n° 8 Jesus' joy

Introduction

Today we are dealing with Jesus' joy. Is it a feeling? In Hebrew, 'joy' and 'festival' are closely linked: joy must be expressed with some gestures. Jesus' joy is very concrete, based on a deep root, His Life. And He invites us to cherish it, as He Himself did, for our joy "to be complete".

Let Jesus' words resound in our hearts. Let us remain in His love, as He bade His disciples, so that our joy may become concrete as His is, and His very joy may be ours too.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit

*Holy Spirit, teach me to hold fast to faith
and let me cherish in my heart and in my life
the Word that You are giving us as a gift.
Grant me to adhere to It with all my strength,
with all my heart, with all my soul and with all my mind,
so that, relying solely on Its power,
I may experience in my daily life
the fruit that only Your Word is able to generate
and I may walk in the footsteps of the Son of God.*

1. Lectio

(to read the Word / to listen to it)

John 15:9-15

9 I have loved you just as my Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in His love. 11 I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete. 12 This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. 13 No one can have greater love than to lay

down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends, if you do what I command you. 15 I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father.

This passage comes from Chapter 15 of St John's Gospel. It is part of the 'Book of Jesus' Hour', ie, the second part of St John's Gospel, and belongs to Jesus' 'Farewell discourses' (13:31-17:26), which He made after the revealing gesture of the washing of feet and before consigning Himself to His enemies.

In Chapter 15 Jesus defines Himself as "the true vine" in which His disciples – if they want to bear fruit – have to remain as "branches". To bear fruit glorifies the Father, who is the Vinedresser and who makes them "disciples". Thus, the disciples will not be "orphans" (14:18), as they will receive the Paraclete. The Holy Spirit will teach the disciples and remind them of all that Jesus has told them: only thus they will be able to keep His commandments, not by exteriorly imitating Jesus. The Holy Spirit's help precedes the new commandment ("to love...") and makes us able to put it into practice. This "new" commandment (new because it is of a superior quality, cf 13:34) will be the main feature distinguishing Jesus' disciples: "Love one another, as I have loved you". But what is the link with Jesus' joy?

Let us divide the text into its different parts...

Inclusion	15:9-12a
Service	15:12b
Friends	15:13-15

Inclusion

9 I have loved you just as my Father has loved me. Remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in His love. 11 I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete. 12 This is my commandment:

"I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete." (15:11) This sentence is between two commandments and matches Jesus' joy with the disciples'. But how can the disciples' joy be complete? In his First Letter, St John writes: "We are writing this to you so that our joy may be complete." (1 Jn 1:4) Joy becomes complete because "that Life was made visible", "we saw it and are giving our testimony"; "we are declaring to you what we have seen and heard so that you too may share our life". Joy comes from the communion with those who, like St John, "have heard", "have seen with their eyes", "have watched and touched with their hands the Verb of life".

Going back to line 11 of our Lectio, we can say that the disciples' joy may be complete if it remains part of the dynamism of Jesus' gift: by "laying down His life" and by "taking it up again" (Jn 10:17-18), ie by fulfilling the Father's commandment, He reveals God's Life, His way of being.

Jesus fulfils the Father's commandment not as a law exterior to Himself, but because it is His true identity, given that He is the mirror of the Father.

This revelation is the one described in 1 Jn: then the disciples' joy comes from bringing others into the communion between the Father and the Son. In order to remain in this love, in this communion, our text says that it is necessary for us to keep the commandment of laying down our life for others. 'To keep', from the Greek 'terèò', means also 'to care for', from 'teros', 'care'.

There is joy, definitely, because whenever we lay down our life for others we also receive it. There is reciprocity, there is joy, given that we receive life by entering the dynamism of God's life.

Service

...love one another, as I have loved you.

We must go back to the first proclamation of the new commandment in Jn 13:34: "Love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you."

"As I have loved you": this verb is in the past tense, because the disciples have already experienced Jesus' love. In particular, in the gesture of the washing of feet, they have witnessed the 'kenosis' ('abasement') of their Master. That was not a gesture denoting humility, but rather God's revelation: God comes down to our level in order to let us have a share in His life, to have a share in that free movement of love, to share the life circulating between the Father and the Son, to share their mutual love.

The promise of joy, expressed between the two invitations to keep the new commandment, reveals that Jesus' very own joy is at the service of the disciples' joy, so that they can "have a share with Him". This has nothing to do with feelings; on the contrary, it is something very down-to-earth, linking 15:12b to the 'how' of 13:14-15 and 13:34. It is a 'gift', 'service'.

"Just as" (I have loved you) denotes a service in which we have to act so that others may grow, become more authentic, happier. We must 'orientate' our lives to others, to the others' good. Joy has a divine root, but it is possible to experience it already in this world, not just as the Jews would think, only in the other world. However, it is a dynamism that grows inasmuch as we become more and more a gift to others, inasmuch as we learn to give. "There is more happiness in giving than in receiving," Acts 20:35 states.

Friends

13 No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends, if you do what I command you. 15 I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father.

All those who are co-responsible for God's plan for the world, are His friends. They receive life from Him and give it to others as a gift, in order to receive more and more of it.

We must let Jesus be at our service: the starting point is His gift of Life, always happening here and now thanks to the Holy Spirit. To let Jesus be at our service

means to receive His Life in the Holy Spirit, in order not to be any longer “servants”, that is, unaware of the “Master’s business”, unaware of Jesus’ love plan, but “friends” called to increase communion and to let His vital sap circulate, as branches letting it flow and bearing fruit in the concrete gestures of love, finding their ‘sap’ in the love that they have received.

Beyond a fake morality, to bear fruit means to make manifest the mystery of the mutual gift of love existing between the Father and the Son.

“When He had washed their feet and put on His outer garments again” (which is the symbol of laying down His life and taking it up again, of stripping Himself and of glory), Jesus said, “Do you understand what I have done to you?” (Jn 13:12-13)

Jesus is making of us the visible sign of God’s love on earth. Joy is linked to be His friends, as well as to the new commandment of love, to receiving life and to laying it down as a gift.

2. Meditatio

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

- How can our joy be concrete?

- What does it mean “to lay down one’s life” for others? Of course, to get rid of our self-centredness and to become self-less, in order for us to be able to see others in their truth and to promote their lives, thus fulfilling our own lives too. ‘Mutuality’ / ‘reciprocity’ is the key-word.

- How can ‘reciprocity’ become real? It is neither just a question of being complementary, nor of expecting something in return (in that case we would be very disappointed), but rather of starting walking on the path to a vital and life-giving growth, generating creative love and consequently gestures which are the fruit of love dwelling in us and being properly cherished, as well as to joy, complete because it is real, factual, concrete, given away as a gift. Jesus’ joy is always present as life received and given away as a gift: the more we outpour it on others, the more we can receive, nourished by the Holy Spirit who is always present and who is always driving us to a dynamic relation with God, who called us “to have a share” in Jesus’ life. “To have a share” means that we may be able not to be servants but friends, and to take part in His lifestyle, and to be vivified like the branch is.

I suggest that you read the following report by Fr Tonino Bello on one of his trips to Africa. It seems to me relevant as far as “to lay down one’s life” and to receive it back is concerned.

“The other day I told your younger friends about a nun I met last summer when I went to Africa, right in the middle of it, when I visited Ethiopia, Sudan and the rest of ‘black Africa’, the wildest Africa, the most beautiful Africa, in the forests, where a doctor has an average of 73,000 patients.

This Spanish nun, called Isabel, very young and beautiful, amazing, was the one and only doctor in a great hospital with 400 beds, established by the local bishop. She was wearing a pair of jeans and a white uniform: she looked like an angel. The other day I related how I happened to see this nun managing to save the life of a young lady who had given birth to a child and who had nearly died from bleeding. This nun was still very happy and triumphant because that young lady was alive, when some women from the forest came to the hospital crying for help. She took off her white uniform, put on a helmet, took her motorbike and off she went to go and help wherever they were calling her....

The bishop, who is an extraordinary man, was moved to tears seeing this nun so generous, giving her life away for others. Afterwards, while we were waiting for her return, I asked: "How can she still be alive and kicking?" And he replied, "Well, maybe you can send her somebody as a help". (...)

That day I forgot to bring with me a big pack of medicines I had received in Bari. That hospital was 700 kilometres from where I was staying. When I told the bishop about it, he replied, "Well, tomorrow you can come back..." I was puzzled... But he went on saying, "My chauffeur will drive you." The following day I went back to the hospital with the bishop's chauffeur, and I arrived around midday. It was very hot, the equatorial sun was scorching, nobody was around. I said, "I'd like to talk with Sr Isabel. Who knows where she is?" There was nobody around, just the hospital patients and flies on their faces. Outside, their wives cooking the meal, because the hospital cannot provide it. They were roasting some maize.

A very little girl came out from the crowd. I had already seen her the previous day. She had very big and beautiful eyes, as all Ethiopians have. The bishop had told me, jokingly, that if I wanted to know how many people were there in a congregation, I just had to count the eyes and then divide it by two... This little girl came to me, took me by the hand, and she took me out of the hospital, as she had understood that I was looking for Sr Isabel. She took me to a hut with a cross on the roof, standing nearby. I realized it was the church. She pushed the door made of reeds, I entered and saw a little tabernacle and a lamp and, in front of it, Sr Isabel kneeling and praying. She was a very exceptional woman, very powerful, like I had never met in Europe. In the silence of the afternoon, in the heart of Africa, I realized there and then which 'fountain' this exceptional woman was drawing her strength, vitality and professional capacity from..."

3. Oratio

(to pray the Word / to repeat it)

O Good Father, You let us see a new kind of happiness
in Jesus, Your Son:
it is the fullness of a life surpassing each and every need,
each and every dream, wealth, power and gratification.

Teach us, Father, this new happiness shining from the Gospel:
it is a happiness that, while making us selfless, fills us, nourishes us, makes us
rich with any kind of goods.

This happiness is the one and only thing that can give us peace of heart,
as well as the realization of all that is beautiful and good in us,
and finally the liberty to live our life to the full.

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

Let us keep our eyes, our souls and our hearts focussed on Jesus' life, so that we
can be nourished by the vital sap of His love, have a share in His joy and in His
becoming a gift for the world.

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

Let us make our joy concrete by sharing what we have gathered from letting the
Word resound in our hearts.