

# **BIBLICAL PAGES**

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

### **Introduction**

This new path, made up of eight Units, will guide us to discover two very important features of Jesus' humanity: anger and meekness.

We will learn how the passion for the good can emerge from our own humanity, as well as the ability to detect those kinds of lies and evil in front of which we should be angered, and also that meekness which is an active longing for peace (not passive), capable of changing our earth into the promised land and to renew mankind. Psalm 37 proclaims that "the meek will inherit the earth", and Jesus proclaims that "they are blessed, they shall have the earth as inheritance" (Mt 5:4). Anger and meekness seem to be opposite... However, the promise of a renewed mankind is fulfilled if we care for the growth of the good, if we care for creatures exactly as God Himself does... being angered... And Jesus is angered too (Mk 1:41; Mk 3:14; Jn 2:15).

But what is it this anger of God? It is something completely different from man's anger, harmful and damaging.

God's anthropomorphism (ie, to give human features to God) is expedient, theologically speaking: it is used to signify God's utter incompatibility with evil and injustice (cf Rm 1:18).

We could then say that God's anger is ordered to man's salvation: to speak of anger, 'orgè in Greek, from the Hebrew term 'ap ('nose'), is an anthropomorphism that shows that God's nostrils are fuming at man's evil. It is an image of Jahweh's anger for those situations and deeds that debase His creature.

Having said that, we can approach Jesus' life and the gospel texts in order to find out the different ways Jesus' anger is expressing the Father's care for His children, preventing them from becoming preys of evil.

Now anthropomorphism is no longer necessary, given that Jesus is a real man, in Him God manifests Himself as a real human being.

But what drives Him? And what would He like to arouse in us? Would He like us to get rid of hypocrisy and to become genuine once again? Would He like to arouse the passion of love? Would He like us to rediscover the truth of our filial relation with God, and of the brotherly relation among us?

To be aroused, shocked, may be important... However, above all, we would like Him to open up our hearts so that we may become able to welcome ‘prays’, ‘meekness’, which in the Greek milieu used to be an ethical virtue, but in the Christian dimension is a divine gift, a fruit of the Spirit, as St Paul says (Ga 5:22). Jesus defines Himself as “meek and humble in heart” (Mt 11:29), setting Himself as an example for us. It is a new way for our humanity to have a sound foundation, building up fraternal relations (Ga 6:1), a new way which had been foretold by Isaiah 42:1-4: the renewal of mankind through non-violence as well as about God-given peace.

We should approach the texts longing to learn from the New Man how to be the “good seed” in history.

## **Lectio n° 1**

### **It is not a fit of madness**

Wrath is commonly regarded as a fit of anger, a capital sin implying a lack of self-control. Here, however, anger is Jesus’ drive for Him to act against a situation where the gratuitous relation between God and man has been perverted.

Is it a fit of anger on Jesus’ part? Or rather a meaningful action, not impulsive but willed, an expression of Messianism according to Scripture?

The Father of the Church had already distinguished between the dimension of anger as revenge and expression of evil thoughts (envy, jealousy, selfishness), and a positive anger addressed to sin, an anger supporting our spiritual combat.

But what is Jesus fighting?

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

*Holy Spirit, who used to fill the prophets with light*

*and inflamed their lips with fiery words,*

*come back to us and tell us words of hope...*

*Get rid of our complacency and complicity.*

*Free us from our sadness for not feeling strong indignation*

*against the injustices the poor have to bear with.*

*And preserve us from the tragedy of having to recognize*

*that the first and foremost ‘workshops’ of violence and injustice*

*are our very hearts...*

*Get rid of the seal on our lips, kept close by carnal prudence.*

*Inject into our veins the utter rejection of each and every compromise.*

*Restrain us from ambiguity.*

*Place Your seal on our witness.*

*And make us abhor all those words that cannot be verified by facts.*

*(Msgr Tonino Bello)*

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

### **John 2:13-17**

*13 When the time of the Jewish Passover was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem, 14 and in the Temple He found people selling cattle and sheep and doves, and the money changers sitting there. 15 Making a whip out of cord, He drove them all out of the Temple, sheep and cattle as well, scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over 16 and said to the dove sellers, 'Take all this out of here and stop using my Father's house as a market'.*

*17 Then His disciples remembered the words of Scripture: "I am eaten up with zeal for Your house".*

Let us read the text...

This passage is placed at the very beginning of St John's Gospel, while the parallel passages of St Matthew's, St Mark's and St Luke's Gospels are placed elsewhere.

St John places it in the Book of the Signs that, if we follow the narrative-kerygmatic model, includes Chapters 1-12. Some scholars have further subdivided this book into two parts: the 'cycle of institutions' (2:1-4:54) and the 'cycle of man' (5:1-11:54).

The former includes six events: the first of them is the first Sign (Cana's Wedding); the last one is the second Sign (The cure of a royal official's son).

According to this model, while the first Sign refers to the fundamental institution of the Covenant, the following passage (the very one we are examining in this Unit) refers to the institution of the Temple. In both of them, Jesus reveals the deep meaning of man's actions and institutions, perverted by customs which mask their true scope and which prevent people from opening up to a deeper meaning, referring to Jesus.

The passage we are examining is indeed placed between the prototype sign of Cana (Jesus-Bridegroom / the new nuptial covenant) and lines 18-21, where Jesus proclaims that the new temple is His own body.

Let us divide the text into its parts:

- a) 2:13            The first Passover
- b) 2:14            Buying and selling
- c) 2:15-16        Jesus' reaction
- d) 2:17            Remembering

### **a) 2:13            The first Passover**

The time setting of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, related here by the evangelist (and in a similar fashion in 6:4; 11:55), is important to determine St John's Gospel's chronology. In this Gospel we find three Passovers, spanning three

years, a period ending with the Lamb of God-Jesus' Passover, as opposed to the Jewish Passover.

St John's report, later than the Synoptics', comes from a community that has pondered more in depths the novelty of the Verb of God made flesh as distinguished from the Jewish tradition, and is therefore able to better highlight the differences – however in continuity – between the Passover of the Jews and the Passover of the Lamb of God. In the fourth gospel's chronology Jesus' death and the sacrifice of the paschal lamb do occur at the same time.

It must be pointed out also that the term 'Jewish Passover' is nowhere to be found in the Old Testament, which makes use of the term 'Passover of the Lord' (cf Ex 6:19-20). Here 'Jewish Passover' thus implies that the feast has become the private property of the priestly caste, and the religious authorities' instrument to rule over the people and to accomplish their goals.

We see also that "Jesus went up to Jerusalem": He lives in the same time and place of the people of Israel, and share their tradition: He does not lead a separate existence, He really belongs to that people and makes use of the same instruments, even though He cannot subscribe to their distortion of the relation with the Father and with the brethren. In a way, this could be defined as 'incarnation with no compromises'.

#### **b) 2:14      Buying and selling**

The Jews over the age of 12 had to go to Jerusalem every year in order to sacrifice the paschal lamb. It was forbidden to carry into the Temple coins with the pagan emperor's face on them, so Roman money had to be changed into 'di-drachmas' (money used in Tyro, made of 90 per cent of silver), the one and only coin that could be used also to pay the Temple tax, half a shekel, for animals to be sacrificed.

It was a big business, a true market held within the Temple gates, in the 'ieròn', but outside of the sacred enclosure.

Line 14 is to be read in the context of both Jeremiah's and Zechariah's prophetic words, respectively that the Temple had become "a den of bandits" (Jr 7:11) and that the House of the Lord God Sabaoth had to be freed from the merchants (Zc 14:21). Ezekiel the prophet had already described the Temple as the dwelling of Jahweh (43:1-12), His departure from it and His return (10:18-19; 11:22-23).

Here, instead, the Temple is the dwelling of the money changers "sitting there". The verb used here is 'katemenous', which means 'to dwell'.

In addition to that, line 19, immediately following the passage we are using for our Lectio, seems to open a new perspective to us: when Jesus speaks of the Temple to be destroyed and rebuilt in three days, the term used by St John is 'naòsche', 'sacred enclosure', which – the evangelist explains – refers to Jesus' body. The difference between the sacred enclosure and the 'ieròn' (that is, the space outside of it) is very relevant.

### c) 2:15-16 Jesus' reaction

“Making a whip out of cord, He drove them all out...”, “scattered the money changers' coins, knocked their tables over and said...”

Is this just a fit of anger as we commonly understand it, or is there something more than that?

The human reaction showing Jesus' wrath refers – in the light of Scripture – to a symbolic event. Indeed, the timing of Jesus' concrete actions, their succession, show how He planned all that.

“Making a whip out of cord”: to make a whip out of cord is a bit time-consuming, and that time may have mitigated the impulsive fit. Anger may be the drive behind one's reactions, helping him to make a stand for his principles; but then comes reasoning, thanks to which the subsequent action is deliberate and not done on an impulse. And we cannot regard it as a political-revolutionary action either, given that it is very different from the zeal of 1 Mc 2:24, where violence is used to re-establish divine rights.

Matter-of-factly, the term employed to designate Jesus' instrument is 'sfragellium', which is the same we find in Mk 15:15, where it designates the instrument by which Jesus is whipped. Therefore, this is a Messianic action, done by a suffering Messiah.

Psalm 69 speaks of the “zeal for God's house”, eating up the just man (Ps 69:2, 8, 10). Thus, Jesus' anger is a vital expression that must be read within the context of His whole life, of all His words and gestures, and, above all, of the epilogue of His life, when zeal is just the opposite: it is not violent but it undergoes violence; it is not a violent zeal serving God, but the zeal of love being part of the unique gift of His whole self.

In addition to Psalm 69, here we find also a reference to the Suffering Servant of Jahweh (Is 42:1-8; 49:1ff; 50:4ff; 52:13-54).

While line 15 describes Jesus' action, getting rid of the temple market with all that was needed for it, like for instance the tables of the money changers, line 16 provides the words giving an explanation to the action, referring us to Zc 14:21 and the house that had to be freed from merchants.

It is indeed a prophetic gesture, because it involves the Messianic liberation and the re-establishment of divine laws. Here it is not a common messiah acting, but THE Messiah who explicitly refers to the Father: “...stop using my Father's house as a market.” The Son has to look after the dwelling of the Father.

Now we can go back to line 19 and following. The destroyed Temple is called 'naòs', that is, the sacred enclosure. The sacred enclosure is Jesus' body, where there is no room for any kind of market: it is the real house of the Father, a house of gratuitous self-giving, the new place where God will be worshipped, so much so that, when meeting the Samaritan woman, He will say: “You will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... True worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (cf Jn 4:21-24).

Here Jesus can be recognized as the Messiah by His gesture, but He will be a very different Messiah from the one His own disciples have imagined...

#### **d) 2:17      Remembering**

The disciples remember... They do not just go back to the words of the Psalm, of Scripture in general or of Jesus, but they remember all that in order to re-orientate the meaning of the words under the light of Easter.

The Gospel starts from the kerygma, from the proclamation of Easter, and re-interprets Jesus' words and gestures in the light of the resurrection (Jn 2:22).

"I am eaten up with zeal for Your house". The disciples start to understand – and we with them – that in Jesus' concrete life 'to be eaten up' means 'to be consumed', to be a gratuitous gift as opposed to the market taking place in the 'ieròn', up to the end, when "it is fulfilled" (Jn 19:30).

The prophetic gesture of the cleansing of the Temple is a Messianic gesture that allows the disciples to understand who the real Messiah is, even though only after Easter, when "they remembered..."

Now the new cleansed temple is the Body of the Risen One, of the Man-God: the 'naòs', the place where the gratuitous gift of the whole self of the Man-God is utterly fulfilled.

## **2. Meditatio**

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

Have we learnt what 'biblical' anger is? That it is a denunciation which does not originate from our psychological condition but which must be put at the service of a gesture referring to a deeper meaning?

Of course, it must not be a fit of temper with the excuse that we are behaving like the prophets or Jesus did... However, in our daily lives we are often called to perform powerful gestures against the "pervading market", so that we can affirm that there is another possible way of living.

Three ideas to summarize the various concepts:

#### *1. To get out of the mass*

Anger may sometimes prompt us to get out of the mass and distinguish ourselves. Jesus' humanity invites us to follow Him on a path that can purify our intentions and get rid of all those which are at the service of personal vengeance.

N° 36 of the Rule of Life reminds us to "nourish our deep love for the Family", "always keeping ourselves open and loyal"; "to realize among us that unity which Christ asked of the Father for His disciples, and which derives from constant prayer."

How many powerful gestures will we have to perform in order to realize unity?

How should we fight for that, with no personal harshness and purifying ourselves in prayer?

### *2. To open ourselves up*

How many times does the defence of “holy things” or of God hide violence and will of power? The reference to Jesus’ passion (sfragellium) urges us to stop (in a similar fashion to Jesus, taking the time to make a whip) and purify / cleanse ourselves and welcome the consequences of our denunciation. To stop helps us adhere to Jesus, open ourselves up to welcome Jesus’ very own ways of acting, get His power and become temples of the Holy Spirit.

### *3. Orienteering*

We must be prompted to act not by any good cause whatsoever, but rather by Jesus’ ultimate goal, the cleansing of our relations with God and with our brethren, so that we may have a global sight allowing us to give gratuitously to each and everybody.

Let us listen to what Fr Ciotti has to say on that. He is in line with pope Francis’ mind and his view of a new ‘Humanism’, including each and every creature, and of the denunciation of injustices and offences.

*Young men and women, rebel yourselves... The future asks us that we move towards it. The world needs a ‘new Humanism’ and an ‘integral ecology’. We should stop thinking about the environment and society as two separate things. To care for Nature and to care for the dignity of man are one and the same thing.*

## **3. Oratio**

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

*Saint Mary, not neutral woman,*

*keep us away from the temptation to serve God and Mammon.*

*Please compel us to stand for our principles.*

*Do not let us be so imprudent to try to make the opposites be reconciled.*

*Preserve us from the sacrilegious attempt to justify,  
out of a perverted understanding of Christian universality,  
the violence against the oppressed.*

*When we do not want to displease the powerful  
or we are afraid that they might not help us any longer,  
and we make compromises on truth,  
make us blush.*

*Free us from our indifference to injustices and to those who are unjust,  
but gives us tolerance.*

*We pray you for the Church,  
help her get rid of her fearful neutrality.*

*Make her proud of being the critical conscience  
of all those sinful institutions that are crushing all those who are unable to defend  
themselves*

*and are pushing two thirds of the world to a sub-human level.*

*(Msgr Tonino Bello)*

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

As a 'temple of the Spirit of Christ', let us mould our own hearts in harmony with the Son's heart's drive.

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

Let us share what has been given to us as a gift in a spirit of gratuitousness and fraternity.