

BIBLICAL PAGES

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

Lectio n° 8 The expectations of the Meek One

Is the meek man subdued? Most people would imagine him to be like that. Let us draw close to Jesus: moulded by a whole life made of attentive listening to the Father, at the end of His life we hear Him saying to the Father, 'I want...'. We are surprised, aren't we? It is in fact the most intense of Jesus' prayers to the Father, a prayer for unity. He can say, 'I want...', with no selfishness, and being in line with the love plan of the Father for each and every one of His children.

This is an additional 'face' of meekness, the result of a trained, mature will, which can say 'I want...' having as its one and only expectation the very will of the Father. This prayer gives rise to a generation of meek men and women, who can say 'I want...' if they are one in love according to the Father's plan.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit

*Lord, we thank You
because You gathered us in Your presence,
so that we may listen to Your Word:
You reveal Your love for us in it
and You make Your will known to us.
May You make any voice in us, different from Yours,
keep quiet,
so that we may not be condemned by Your Word,
a Word read but not welcomed,
meditated upon but not loved,
praised but not cherished,
contemplated but not put into practice...
May You send Your Holy Spirit on us,
to open our minds and to heal our hearts.
Only thus our own encounter
with Your Word
will be a renewal of the Covenant,
communion with You and the Son*

*and the Holy Spirit,
God, blessed for ever and ever.
Amen.*

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

John 17:22-26

22 Father, I have given them the glory You gave to me, / that they may be one as we are one. / 23 With me in them and You in me, / may they be so perfected in unity / that the world will recognize that it was You who sent me / and that You have loved them as You have loved me. / 24 Father, I want those You have given me / to be with me where I am, / so that they may always see my glory / which You have given me / because You loved me / before the foundation of the world. 25 Father, Upright One, / the world has not known You, / but I have known You, / and these have known / that You have sent me. 26 I have made Your name known to them / and will continue to make it known, / so that the love with which You loved me may be in them, / and so that I may be in them.

Let us approach the text...

This is the Book of Jesus' Hour, Chapter 17, Jesus' prayer to the Father before His passion... The evangelist St John describes a long parenthesis of intimacy between Jesus and His Father: Jesus gives back to the Father all that He has received from Him, that is, humanity recapitulated in love. The very moment when He will say, 'Everything is fulfilled', is about to come. That is not the end of the story, but indeed the opening of a new dimension, the dimension of universal communion.

This chapter has already a paschal dimension. It encompasses all the meaning of Jesus' mission, all the meaning of His deeds (from the symbolical ones such as the 'washing of feet' to the events leading Him to the cross).

Chapter 17 is also called 'The priestly prayer of Jesus', and some authorities find in it the same structure of the 'anaphora', that is, the prayer that nowadays precedes the Eucharistic Prayer, revealing Jesus' feelings and His attitude while offering Himself. The chapter may be divided into three parts, like concentric circles:

1-5 Jesus talks to the Father about Himself; 6-19 about His disciples; 20-26 about all those who will believe in Him.

Let us divide the text into its parts:

Glory	17:22-23
"I want..."	17:24
To know	17:25-26

Glory

22 Father, I have given them the glory You gave to me, / that they may be one as we are one. / 23 With me in them and You in me, / may they be so perfected in unity / that the world will recognize that it was You who sent me / and that You have loved them as You have loved me.

What is this glory that the Father has given to Jesus? In Exodus 40:34-35, 'glory' is the 'shekinà', the tent, God's dwelling. From the Prologue in St John's Gospel (1:14) we gather that the fourth evangelist sees in Jesus God's tent, the place where we can meet God: the glory of the Only-Begotten Son is God's glory; God can be known by man, as He manifests Himself through Jesus' flesh. We could also say that Jesus is God's transparency, given that the Father is in Him.

In line 22 Jesus proclaims that He has given the glory, His being a manifestation of the presence of the Father, to the disciples. The patristic tradition helps us understand that the glory is a correspondence between substance and form: He who is, does not remain hidden.

Then we are said that we have received the presence of the Father in Jesus Christ, so that we may be one with Them just as Jesus Christ and the Father are one. Only thus can we be a manifestation of the glory, exactly like Jesus, and reveal God's presence, if Christ is in us.

I would like to stress that what's at stake here is not just the unity between Father and Son within the Trinity, but the unity between Jesus the Man and the Father. Jesus is the principle thanks to which the flesh of any man or woman can become a manifestation of the relation between Jesus and the Father, a manifestation of Their unity. Thanks to the fact that He is Man-God, Jesus has given humanity the glory that the Father has given Him. Therefore, the more our own flesh is transformed in Jesus, the more we become One.

Not just one thing, something that has been put together, but being One. God is One. The fact that Jesus has given to those who believe in Him the same glory that He has received from the Father, sends us back to line 10, where He states that He is glorified in the disciples: Jesus in them, and the Father in Him... This is an indwelling that is equal to perfection. We must give up our own ideas of perfection: being perfect means to be fulfilled, and the relation of belonging and reciprocity between man and God which is Jesus' very mission must be fulfilled. Being One... this must be fulfilled. Only thus will the world know the mission that Jesus has received from the Father and the Father's love, widened and encompassing each and every man. To be perfect, to be fulfilled means to be deified. The humankind may be deified because they have been loved by the Father with the same love with which Jesus is loved...

The following lines will tell much more about that.

"I want..."

24 Father, I want those You have given me / to be with me where I am, / so that they may always see my glory / which You have given me / because You loved me / before the foundation of the world.

This is the one and only occurrence in the Gospels of the word ‘I want’ as uttered by Jesus to the Father. We have already read that His food is doing the Father’s will (cf Jn 4:34); that He does what He sees the Father doing (cf Jn 5:19); that He declares what He has learnt from Him (cf 8:26).

How can the Meek One par excellence say ‘I want’? Who does He beg for, and why does He leave no chance to say ‘No’? He asks for “those You have given me”. If You have given them to me, how could they be in a place different from the one where I am? In another line we read: “They were Yours and You gave them to me” (17:6).

We belong to the Father because He is our Creator, and to Jesus because He has taken upon Himself our very nature. Jesus cares for us, we are a precious item entrusted to Him, who took our flesh in order for it to dwell where He is, in the Father.

a)

This implies that the first thing is to see, ‘theoreo’, that is, ‘to contemplate’ His glory, the presence of the Father in Him, that has been given to Him.

What does it mean that the Father gave Him the glory? We gather that the glory, the presence of God that must be shown in its fullness, and that it has already been shown by His deeds (cf Jn 14:11), derives from love: it has been given Him because the Father loved Him before the foundation of the world. Glory is the fullness of love that Jesus has to reveal, and that we will be able to see and contemplate: the presence of God as love. St John makes us understand that, before the foundation of the world, Christ already owned that love-presence that would later be manifested as Jesus’ glory up to its manifestation in His Hour.

From the time before the foundation of the world, in all of Jesus’ deeds and above all in His Hour, when He will be glorified on the Cross, we can contemplate the love and presence of the Father in Jesus Christ.

The new idea that line 24 introduces is then glory not regarded just as presence, but also as love. Love before Creation is the Spirit, Love who is a perennial exchange within the Trinity.

Now we can understand line 22 better. The Spirit / Love that the Father has given Jesus, He has given us too. That is the reason why, according to line 23, we can understand that the Father has loved us as He has loved Jesus.

“I want...” means then that we must take part in divine love, established for us before the foundation of the world, given that we have been created in Christ.

b)

Our task is therefore not only to see (‘theoreo’) but also to take part in it. In this regard, the Church Fathers speak of ‘deification’. In this passage from St John’s Gospel, before the final glorification on the Cross and at the Resurrection (the

final display of the love of the Father), the expectations of Jesus consist in wanting for us what St Peter would later express in his Second Letter as “sharing in His divine nature” (2 P 1:4). Jesus is not jealous of it. In fact, sharing it with men is the goal of His whole life. He does not want to waste His life, He wants unity. “He did not count equality with God something to be grasped” (Ph 2:6), but He shared everything wholeheartedly. He practiced meekness as a will of communion. To contemplate His glory means to see the image we are a mirror of, Christ, and at the same time the Father (cf Jn 14:8).

Deification is not therefore a journey of the soul, but a transformation of the whole person according to Christ. Who is painting in us the likeness of Christ the Image?

To know

25 Father, Upright One, / the world has not known You, / but I have known You, / and these have known / that You have sent me. 26 I have made Your name known to them / and will continue to make it known, / so that the love with which You loved me may be in them, / and so that I may be in them.

“Father, Upright One”. Upright, that is, faithful to His promises. “The world has not known You”, it has not experienced, loved, Your faithfulness, Your care for humankind and Your plan for a communion in love. On the contrary I, I have known You – Jesus says – and I have known how faithful, steadfast, eternal Your love is. Those who are mine have experienced Your faithfulness because they believe that I have been sent by You for them. But what is needed to experience knowledge?

Jesus lets us know the Father’s name. To know someone’s name means to be able to invoke him. And not only that. In Israel’s history, ‘God’s name’ meant His being in our midst, even though He surpasses everything that is human. Then we can state that God’s Name is His relationship with us, His care for us, His gift of Himself for us, while remaining infinitely great.

Jesus made us know the Father’s name, and He revealed a new way for God to be present: Jesus Himself. And He would make that Name known even more at His glorification on the Cross, so that the gift of the relationship might be perpetuated. But how?

In harmony with St John’s theology, glorification on the Cross (‘Everything is fulfilled’) coincides with giving up His Spirit. In the passage we are dealing with the Spirit is indirectly present as well. Line 26 should be interpreted thus: the revelation of the Name, the new closeness of God to men through Jesus Christ, implies that Love, the Holy Spirit, with Whom He has loved the Son from eternity, may be given to us, and Christ may be in us too. Indeed, all that was fulfilled! The Holy Spirit makes Christ present in us. It is Him who is painting in us the likeness of Christ and, through Him, who is the Son of the Father, we are accompanied to the depths of the Father. This is the ‘deification’.

To recapitulate, not only 1) *glory* is 2) *God's presence* and 3) *love*, but also 4) the ever growing *dynamic experience* of the image of Christ in us through the Spirit.

According to the evangelist St John, to know is to experience the closeness of a love changing us, transforming us in Christ for us to be in the Father: the whole Trinity fulfilled that for us, so that we can be One.

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

If we look into ourselves, very often we find out that our meekness is not founded on a deep trust in the Father, on a genuine desire to see His great plan for the world fulfilled. Very often our meekness is lacking in trust, afraid that, at the end of the day, to become part of God's great, global plan, might chastise our own personal projects. We are unable to say, 'I want...' There is a division between the 'I' and the 'We', resulting in a self-centred aggressiveness or, alternatively, in a depersonalized meekness (weakness) towards a fake image of God or towards our brothers and sisters' expectations.

Jesus the Man does not say that to our humanity, to our femininity. We wonder what the foundation of our will is. Are we able to say 'I want' with an enlarged, self-less conscience, in order to reach communion while still being distinct one from the other? How do we understand our membership in the Church? Do we believe in the journey towards the One?

Please find here a meditation by Michelina Tenace, taken from the book 'Dire l'uomo. Dall'immagine alla somiglianza. La salvezza come divinizzazione' ('Speaking about man. From the image to the likeness. Salvation as deification').

“Nowadays the Church believes more and more that love / *koinonia* is a fruitful and creative tension giving rise to both unity and plurality. Unity around the person of Christ; plurality around the reality of the Holy Spirit. The task of theology would be to study that link between Christ as the centre of faith and the Holy Spirit as the centre of Christian life. When we say that the Church is '*koinonia*' we do refer to no other kind of communion but the very personal communion existing among the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit... That implies that the Church is by definition incompatible with individualism... The challenge and the creativity are: how can we live up to love, building unity and not destroying diversity? If we pay attention to what is happening around us, we will realize that that is the very core of the problem of our own world. How can we be one within the family? How can man and woman be united, as well as parents and children, while remaining different? In politics, the awakening of nationalism makes us wonder: how can we cherish our own culture, our own tradition, while not excluding others from it?

In the Church too the issue of unity and diversity is topical: how can the growth of local churches be respected, with all the diversity it implies, and at the same time the universal character of the Church be maintained? (...) At times we think that the problem of the Church's unity may be a question of bilateral agreements on issues regarding the Pope and the Orthodox Patriarchs, for instance. In fact, the challenge of unity in diversity is at the very foundation of the Church herself: it is the challenge of love, not allowing us to rest until we will all be in the 'All' which is Trinitarian love. Will we be able to sow such 'seeds' of novelty into holiness? By the way, should we have any other ambition rather than that? (...)

The Holy Spirit is the main protagonist of that novelty and pours into the Church the features of eschatology, communion and transfiguration, without which the Church cannot be understood. The Holy Spirit makes us focus on a point which is beyond history. The ecclesial institutions do not find their steadfastness in history, but rather in the constant depending of the whole people of God from the Holy Spirit. Both the eschatological plenitude and the communion of the saints are expressed at the end of the Creed as the expectation of a life transfigured by God's love and mercy. Transfiguration is the work of the Holy Spirit. The substance and the goal of the Church consist in the transfiguration of humankind and the universe through the restoration of their unity with God. The historical evolution does not tend towards the abolition of antinomies but rather towards the transfiguration of all the ambits of life."

3. Oratio

(to pray the Word / to repeat it)

Father, I would like...

Father, I would like to say 'I want', but it should not be a whimsical act.

I would like to say 'I want' as the decision of a life welcoming Yours.

I would like to say 'I want', but I can't if I am far from the heart of Your Son.

I am listening to Him, and learning what He is asking You for me,

and I feel more and more at home, accompanied by His expectation that I may be with Him, with You all.

I would like to be brave, and not prudently lukewarm.

I would like to come to You in all transparency

and with the expectation that I could ask Your very same desire for goodness for all the people that You gave me,

that in my personal history You put in my hands...

and for that total Adam of each and every time and place,

for that multitude of people journeying towards You,

so that they can discover that they are One.

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

Let us be reached by Jesus' desire for unity, so that it may mould all of us too.

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

Let us share the joy coming from all the diversities that the Holy Spirit made come to the fore in us, and let us regard them as different aspects of our communion around the Word of Christ.