

FAITH AND REASON

A Change of Stride: The Holy Father said it many times throughout the course of this long, now-concluded year 2020: crisis transforms us; at the end of a crisis we are different than we were before, whether better or worse, but different.

On the last day of the year, a painful bout of sciatica constrained the Pope, who was unable to preside the year ending and beginning rites. This sciatic nerve pain is not new to him but the timing of the small and simple “clinical” episode strikes a chord, transporting it to a symbolic level. Thoughts wander to the biblical text and in particular to the sciatica that struck Jacob at the end of his night-time encounter struggle with the angel of the Lord at the ford of the Jabbok. It is the episode of Jacob’s struggle with God (Gen 32:23-33), a “mysterious event”, as Romano Guardini observed, which “sinks down into the memory and remains embedded there. Perhaps one does not understand it, or one feels it is full of the most sacred reality. One ponders it, takes it out, and always finds in it something more”. At the end of the episode, after the difficult nighttime struggle, day breaks, and with the sunrise we see Jacob limping because of his thigh his sciatic nerve was injured after his “thigh was put out of joint”. The fight, a fast paced hand-to-hand battle with many twists and turns, took place during the night, when “Jacob was left alone”.

This 2020 was the long night in which humanity found itself alone, fighting a dogged battle whose end, a new sunrise, we could only glimpse in recent days. Of this year, everyone will remember the images of 27 March, with the Pope alone in the rain as the sun set on a dark evening, emerging into the desolation of Saint Peter’s Square to beseech the Lord, almost like Noah, who in the flood sought salvation on behalf of everyone. Pope Francis, like Noah but now also like Jacob, who walked in the light of dawn with a sense of strength and more confidence because he had asked for and received the blessing from the angel of the Lord and heard his words: “you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed!” He is not the same Francis as before, as a year ago, just as it was for the biblical patriarch (whose name God also changed from Jacob to Israel), and both have a limp. They had to alter their stride. It is crisis that brings this on it is the propitious time for change, for conversion. A change of stride; this is what is needed to cross the threshold of an unprecedented time that holds the promise of a new light. Only by changing stride, one’s usual way of walking, can one see the world from another perspective. Those who insist on walking as they did before will remain rigid with rigor mortis. However, those who recognize that a crisis has come and, by throwing everything into disarray, has marked us all without distinction will live.

There is a “warning light” that signals whether this transition has truly taken place in depth or was only an emotional and superficial fact, and this detail too flows from the biblical episode: the “warning light” is our relationship with our brothers and sisters. Jacob is there, alone, at the ford of the river, in the anguish of the imminent encounter with his dreaded brother Esau. Only after encountering and struggling with God will he be able to embrace and reconcile with his brother. It is the path that Pope Francis points out to us with the Encyclical Fratelli Tutti, which he had envisioned before, but finished writing during the pandemic: at the time of crisis, the way out is to ask God for the strength to open ourselves up to others, to take care of our brothers and sisters by breaking the chains of victimhood and narcissism. We will be healed if we take care of others. Before us there is a ford to be crossed, and it can be done, but only if we are ready for this painful and essential change of stride.

The Heroic Patience of David: By patience we are supported when, amid the troubles of this world, our happiness is postponed. It was with such patience that King David endured attacks of his son Absalom. Although he could easily have destroyed Absalom, David forbade those who were grieved and upset by such treason to take vengeance on his wayward son. He accepted the moment as a time for humility and bowed to the will of God and drank the bitter wine of his son's disloyalty with the greatest patience..... **St Augustine**

Love Unloved: Ye call me Master and obey me not, Ye call me light and see me not, Ye call me way and walk me not, Ye call me life and desire me not, Ye call me wise and follow me not, Ye call me fair and love me not, Ye call me rich and ask me not, Ye call me eternal and seek me not, Ye call me gracious and trust me not, Ye call me noble and serve me not, Ye call me mighty and honor me not, Ye call me just and fear me not, If I condemn you, blame me not.... **Engraved on the Cathedral of Lubeck, Germany.**

A Smile in his Heart: A man on earth He wandered once, all meek and undefiled. And those who loved him said "he wept" - but none ever said "He smiled"; yet there might have been a smile unseen, when he bowed his holy face to bless that happy child ...
Elizabeth Barrett Browning

God Penetrates Human Events: History is not in the hands of the powers of darkness, chance or human decisions all one. When evil energy that we see is unleashed, when Satan vehemently bursts in, when a multitude of scourges and ills surface, the Lord, the Supreme arbiter of historical events, arises. He leads history wisely forward the dawn of the new heavens and the new earth ... There is consequently a new desire to reaffirm that God is not indifferent to human events but penetrates them, creating his own "ways" or, in other words, his effective plans and "deeds".....

The nations must learn to "read" God's message in history.

The adventure of humanity is not confused and meaningless, nor is it doomed never to be appealed against or to be abused by the overbearing and the perverse.... This attitude of faith leads men and women to recognize the power of God who works in history and thus to open themselves to feeling awe for the name of the Lord. In biblical language, in fact, this "fear" is not fright. It is recognition of the mystery of divine transcendence. Thus, it is at the root of faith and is interwoven with love. As St Hilary of Poitiers, a fourth century bishop said: "All our fear is in love".....**Pope Benedict XVI**

A Thought For the Day

Sunday	The absent are like children, helpless to defend themselves.
Monday	Nothing is or can be accidental with God.
Tuesday	The mode by which the inevitable comes to pass is effort.
Wednesday	The end of a person is action, and not thought, though it be of the noblest.
Thursday	Administration not only has to be good, it must be felt to be good by those affected.
Friday	Good counsels observed are chains of grace.
Saturday	The world does not require so much to be informed as to be reminded.

Good Samaritans: Parents must be encouraged to face this far-from-easy situation without turning in on themselves. It is important that the problem be shared not only with close relatives, but also with qualified persons and friends. These are the "Good Samaritans" of our time who, by their generous and friendly presence, repeat the gesture of Christ, who always made his comforting closeness felt by the sick and those in difficulty ... **St John Paul II**

St Ignatius of Antioch: St Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, was the second successor of St Peter as Bishop of that City. The ancient historian Eusebius relates that Ignatius began his Episcopate in A.D. 69. He was martyred in Rome in A.D. 107. The only authentic writings of St Ignatius are his seven letters, written on his way to martyrdom. Six of these were addressed to the Christian communities of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Rome, Philadelphia, and Smyrna. The seventh letter was sent to St Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna. While all seven letters are a precious monument in writings of the early Church, the letters to the Romans, Smyrna, Philadelphia, and his Letter to Bishop Polycarp are outstanding.

St Ignatius is the first to have used the expression "Catholic Church" (Smyrnaeans 8:2).

He tells the Romans that the Church of Rome "presides in the chief place of the Roman territory" that it is "presiding in love". He tells the Philadelphians to "partake of one Eucharist, for one is the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one is the cup to unite us with his blood". In his letter to Polycarp, he spells out the duties of a Bishop. Jesus Christ is the central theme of St Ignatius' thought. But the Christ for whom he is so eager to die is the Christ of history who "suffered really, as he also raised himself from the dead" **Smyrnaeans 2**

The Glory of the Church: Everywhere where I have recalled in these books that the Church has neither spot nor wrinkle, must not be taken in the sense that the Church is already thus, but rather, that she is in preparation to become such when she appears in glory. Now in fact, because of the ignorance and feebleness of her members, she may as a whole say every day "Forgive us our trespasses" **St Augustine**

The Spirit: God cannot fill you unless you empty yourself. God cannot enrich you unless you impoverish yourself. God cannot exalt you unless you humble yourself.

In His Will is Our Peace
Fr. William C. Mooney

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