

FAITH AND REASON

Even dark moments are a time for praise: We will take our cue from a critical passage in the life of Jesus. After the first miracles and the involvement of the disciples in proclaiming the Kingdom of God, the mission of the Messiah undergoes a crisis. John the Baptist has doubts and makes Him receive this message — John is in jail: “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” (Mt 11:3). He feels this anguish of not knowing whether he is mistaken in his proclamation. There are always dark moments, moments of spiritual nighttime, and John is going through this moment. There is hostility in the villages along the lake, where Jesus had performed so many prodigious signs (cf. Mt 11:20- 24). Now, precisely in this disappointing moment, Matthew relates a truly surprising fact: Jesus does not raise a lament to the Father but, rather, a hymn of jubilation: “I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes”. Thus, in the midst of a crisis, amid the darkness of the soul of so many people, such as John the Baptist, Jesus blesses the Father, Jesus praises the Father. But why?

First and foremost, he praises Him for who He is: “Father, Lord of heaven and earth”. Jesus rejoices in his spirit because he knows and feels that his Father is the God of the Universe, and vice versa, the Lord of all that exists is the Father, “My Father”. Praise springs from this experience of feeling that he is “Son of the Most High”. Jesus feels he is Son of the Most High.

And then Jesus praises the Father for favoring the little ones. It is what he himself experiences, preaching in the villages: the “learned” and the “wise” remain suspicious and closed; they make calculations; while the “little ones” open themselves and welcome his message. This can only be the will of the Father, and Jesus rejoices in this. We too must rejoice and praise God because humble and simple people welcome the Gospel. When I see these simple people, these humble people who go on pilgrimages, who go to pray, who sing, who praise, people who perhaps lack many things but whose humility leads them to praise God. In the future of the world and in the hopes of the Church there are always the “little ones”: those who do not consider themselves better than others, who are aware of their own limitations and their sins, who do not want to lord it over others, who, in God the Father, recognize that we are all brothers and sisters.

Therefore, in that moment of apparent failure, where everything is dark, Jesus prays, praising the Father. And his prayer also leads us, readers of the Gospel, to judge our personal defeats in a different way, to judge differently the situations in which we do not see clearly the presence and action of God, when it seems that evil prevails and there is no way to stop it. Jesus, who highly recommended the prayer of asking, at the very moment when he would have had reason to ask the Father for explanations, instead begins to praise him. It seems to be a contradiction, but therein lies the truth. To whom is praise helpful? To us or to God? A text of the Eucharistic liturgy invites us to pray to God in this way, it says this: “Although you have no need of our praise, yet our thanksgiving is itself your gift, since our praises add nothing to your greatness, but profit us for salvation”. By giving praise, we are saved.

The prayer of praise is helpful to us. The Catechism defines it this way: it “shares in the blessed happiness of the pure of heart who love God in faith before seeing him in glory”. Paradoxically it must be practiced not only when life fills us with happiness, but above all in difficult moments, in moments of darkness when the path becomes an uphill climb. That too is the time for praise, like Jesus who in the dark moment praises the Father. Because we learn that, through that ascent, that difficult path, that wearisome path, those demanding passages, we get to see a new panorama, a broader horizon. Giving praise is like breathing pure oxygen: it purifies the soul, it makes you look far ahead, it does not leave you imprisoned in the difficult and dark moment of hardship.

There is a great teaching in that prayer that for eight centuries has never lost its beat, that Saint Francis composed at the end of his life: the “Canticle of Brother Sun” or “of the creatures”. The Poverello did not compose it in a moment of joy, of well-being, but on the contrary, in the midst of difficulty. Francis was by then almost blind, and he felt in his soul the weight of a solitude he had never before experienced: the world had not changed since the beginning of his preaching, there were still those who let themselves be torn apart by quarrels, and in addition he was aware that death was approaching ever nearer.

It may have been a moment of disillusionment, of that extreme disillusionment and the perception of his own failure. But at that instant of sadness, in that dark instant Francis prays. How does he pray? “Praised be You, my Lord...”. He prays by giving praise. Francis praises God for everything, for all the gifts of creation, and even for death, which he courageously calls “sister”, “sister death”. These examples of saints, of Christians, and also of Jesus, of praising God in difficult moments, open to us the gates of a great road towards the Lord, and they always purify us. Praise always purifies.

The Saints show us that we can always give praise, in good times and bad, because God is the faithful Friend. This is the foundation of praise: God is the faithful Friend, and his love never fails. He is always beside us. He always awaits us. It has been said that “he is the sentinel who is close to you and keeps you going forward with confidence”. In difficult and dark moments, let us have the courage to say: “Blessed are you, O Lord”. Praising the Lord. This will do us much good... **Holy Father's catechesis on Prayer**

My child, I am the Lord Who gives strength in the day of trouble. Come to Me when all is not well with you. Your tardiness in turning to prayer is the greatest obstacle to heavenly consolation, for before you pray earnestly to Me you first seek many comforts and take pleasure in outward things. Thus, all things are of little profit to you until you realize that I am the one Who saves those who trust in Me, and that outside of Me there is no worth-while help, or any useful counsel or lasting remedy.”... **Thomas à Kempis, The Imitation of Christ**

Wait upon God with loving and pure attentiveness, working no violence on yourself lest you disturb the soul's peace and tranquility. God will feed your soul with heavenly food since you put no obstacle in His way. The soul in this state must remember that if it is not conscious of making progress, it is making much more than when it was walking on foot, because God Himself is bearing it in His arms. Although outwardly it is doing nothing, it is in reality doing more than if it were working, since God is doing the work within it. And it is not remarkable that the soul does not see this, for our senses cannot perceive what God does in the soul. . . if the soul stays in God's care it will certainly make progress... **Saint John of the Cross**

"**Let go**," He says. "Let go." But my heart is stubborn, so I do not let go. "What if it hurts?" I say. "I know it will hurt," He says. "What if I fall?" I say louder. "I know you will fall," He says. "But what if I can't get up? What if I can't go on? What if my heart breaks into a thousand pieces?" "It's all right; just let go." "No. I can't. I want to, but I can't." "Let go." "How? My heart will break. It is breaking already." "So it will break. Let go." "I can't. It hurts."

"Don't you know, my child? If you fall, I will pick you up. If you can't go on, I will carry you. Don't you know, my child? Don't you know? It is when it breaks that I can make you whole again. It is when it breaks that I can pick out these broken pieces that are hurting you. It is when it breaks that you can truly learn to love. You can rise again. You will rise again. **Let go**."

A Thought For the Day

Sunday Prayer, then, is a matter of our participating in the life of Jesus Christ.

Monday It is only through shadows that one comes to know the light.

Tuesday The fear of God is a paradise of Blessings, its canopy is over all that is glorious.

Wednesday We come nearest to the great when we are great in humility.

Thursday The cross reminds us that there is no true love without suffering, there is no gift of life without pain.

Friday To be deep in history is to cease to be a Protestant.

Saturday The joys of Jesus will be my strength. It will be in my heart. Every person I meet will see it in my work, my walk, my prayer.

God freely created us so that we might know, love, and serve him in this life and be happy with him forever. God's purpose in creating us is to draw forth from us a response of love and service here on earth, so that we may attain our goal of everlasting happiness with him in heaven. All the things in this world are gifts of God, created for us, to be the means by which we can come to know him better, love him more surely, and serve him more faithfully. As a result, we ought to appreciate and use these gifts of God insofar as they help us toward our goal of loving service and union with God. But insofar as any created things hinder our progress toward our goal, we ought to let them go." ... **St. Ignatius of Loyola**

Prayer of St. Dominic: May God the Father who made us bless us. May God the Son send his healing among us. May God the Holy Spirit move within us and give us eyes to see with, ears to hear with, and hands that your work might be done. May we walk and preach the word of God to all. May the angel of peace watch over us and lead us at last by God's grace to the Kingdom.

Are we not perhaps all afraid in some way? If we let Christ enter fully into our lives, if we open ourselves totally to him, are we not afraid that He might take something away from us? Are we not perhaps afraid to give up something significant, something unique, something that makes life so beautiful? Do we not then risk ending up diminished and deprived of our freedom? . . . No! If we let Christ into our lives, we lose nothing, nothing, absolutely nothing of what makes life free, beautiful and great. No! Only in this friendship are the doors of life opened wide. Only in this friendship is the great potential of human existence truly revealed. Only in this friendship do we experience beauty and liberation. And so, today, with great strength and great conviction, on the basis of long personal experience of life, I say to you, dear young people: Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ – and you will find true life. Amen... **Pope Benedict XVI**

In His Will is Our Peace

Fr. William C. Mooney

Spiritual Direction and Confession

Email: Fr.WCmooney@gmail.com

Appointments: (904) 824-6625

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