

Christ is the fulcrum of all things

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Memorial of St John Damascene

We are in a paradoxical period of the Church's calendar. At the beginning of the new Liturgical Year we approach the final days of the Great Jubilee Year 2000. Our extraordinary celebrations will end on the Solemnity of the Lord's Epiphany 2001. We are concluding our year-long thanksgiving for the unexpected event in the life of Mary, the Virgin-Mother of Nazareth. But the reality is that the Season of Advent complements the Jubilee 2000. The readings of Advent propose to us an extraordinary richness of life. The connection between the two readings of today is hope, the hope of all peoples: "Many peoples will come...". Thus the liturgy increases our hope. The Church does not wish that our prayer be restricted to a personal horizon, but that it be opened to welcome the desires of everyone, all the aspirations of all peoples so that they might find their satisfaction in Christ. It is to him that "all the nations will stream".

This is the true meaning of the note of catholicity. The Church is catholic, not in the sense that de facto she includes peoples of all times and places. Rather, the Church is catholic in that she knows that Jesus Christ appeals to and is able to fulfil the hopes and desires of all men and women of every time, of every culture, of every place. In fact, the Church was already catholic in the small upper room on the first Pentecost on Mt. Zion.

This deepened awareness of the note of catholicity has been one of the many fruits of the Jubilee Year. As my eyes embraced the 2.400.000 young people at Tor Vergata on August 20 last summer, I gave thanks to God for allowing the grace of the Spirit of Jesus to work in the hearts and minds of the young from innumerable peoples, tribes and cultures of all five continents.

Consequently, in this first Advent of the new millennium, we need to open our hearts, we need to think of all those who do not yet know the Lord or do not wish to know him, and yet have a tragic need for him.

The Jubilee Year has deepened my understanding and conviction that the Incarnate Son of God on the Cross renews and holds together all things between heaven and earth. Stretched out on the Cross which is as wide as the heavens and which stands between earth and heaven, he "is the fulcrum of all things, the foundation of the universe, the bond of the cosmos.... He is the totality of all things throughout" (early Christian writer).

Our lives should be a freely given witness that reveals him to all. There is no love compared to Jesus's love for us. By being bound up with the world in the indissoluble union of two separate natures - divine and human in one Person - God will never again be without the world. God has designed and predestined man as the brother of his eternal Son become man. For our sake, Jesus alone has known not only what it means to live in the Father, to rest in his bosom, to love him, to accept his mission, but also he alone has known the full significance of being abandoned by the Father. The Crucified Christ went down into the night of abandonment by God and the formless chaos of hell, so that beyond everything that man can see as beautiful, Jesus joined God and the world in the new and eternal covenant.

Only Jesus's love for us, which reveals the love of the Father, is credible. But, Jesus warned, only those with holy simplicity can see this love. He opposed the despised child to that which thought devises as the greatest and the way that leads to Jesus and to the God who sends him is the acceptance of the "least one" "in my name". It is for that reason that Baptism is called the Sacrament of rebirth - by Baptism we are made children of God in Christ the only Son! All the hopes of those who wish to be free, all the beautiful sentiments sowed by God and desired by men, we carry them in ourselves, we make them more living. Thus it is important that our prayer be for the salvation of the world.

The Gospel tells us how we are to meet Christ who is coming. Above all, we must know what we need from him. The centurion had the need of the intercession of Christ for his servant who suffered. We also need to have present our needs, to be aware of our misery.

We think of the centurion's humility. Even if we have needs, even if we carry suffering in our lives, we are not worthy that Christ should be troubled by us. He understood the intent of the most revolutionary of Jesus's commandments: "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it". We must not think that it is natural

that the Son of God should take care of us; we do not merit him.

We think of the centurion's faith. Jesus's surprise at his faith shows that, when it really occurs, faith always partakes of the miraculous. He does not reject the officer's trust in what he says; he does not even direct attention away from himself, as do the prophets and the apostles and even the angels. On the contrary, he says that this is an expression of "great faith". This shows that faith is not simply assent to a simple doctrine, although it certainly includes such assent. Faith always expresses itself in vital terms. At Baptism, the priest asks what we seek of the Church. Our response, "Faith!".

To know that Christ has the means of freely giving us new life and is capable of acting and willing to act on our behalf requires that we leave the way he will come to us up to him. A modern Christian finding himself or herself in the situation of the centurion might wish that Jesus would come to his home in person, complete personally and visibly the miracle. The centurion rejected this, and was satisfied with something less strong, but in reality something more profound with a more intimate commitment took place: that Christ with his word alone would be present and heal his servant.

This is a very important point. We should not demand that the Lord comes to us in our way, e.g. by an external manifestation of his power. In Advent we need to come to a profounder form of faith. And Christ underlines the profound faith of the centurion.

We ask Christ to help our faith in welcoming him as he wishes to present himself. For he always reveals himself in the way more adapted to our needs

Because of his suffering for us and of his eucharistic surrender of his life for us, Jesus empowers us inwardly to do the Father's will together with Him.

So in Him and through Him and with Him, let us now offer our Great Prayer of Thanksgiving to the Father.

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