
MOMENTS OF CONTEMPLATION



Words like the following: “If we only took the time to look, to listen, and to love, a new person would be reborn” – invite us to serious reflection. The directive, “Let us enter into the presence of God and worship Him,” established our day in the Lord’s presence. In his Apostolic Letter on the new millennium, Pope John Paul II encourages us to make of our Creed a living profession of faith. This Creed is no longer an overworked formula, barren and impersonal, but a contemplation of the very basics. The French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupéry wrote, “One sees well only with the heart.” Following are excerpts of the Pope’s meditation on the basics.

THIRST FOR GOD

«The men and women of our own day – often perhaps unconsciously – ask believers not only to “speak” of Christ, but in a certain sense to “show” him to them. And is it not the Church’s task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium? Our witness, however, would be hopelessly inadequate if we ourselves had not first contemplated his face.

THE WITNESS OF THE GOSPELS

«The contemplation of Christ’s face cannot fail to be inspired by all that we are told about him in Sacred Scripture, so that Saint Jerome can vigorously affirm: “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ”. Remaining deeply anchored in Scripture, we open ourselves to the action of the Spirit (Cf. Jn. 15:26) from whom the sacred texts derive their origin, as well as the witness of the Apostles (Cf. Jn. 15:27), who had a first-hand experience of Christ, the Word of life: they saw him with their eyes, heard him with their ears, touched him with their hands (Cf. 1 Jn. 1:1). The Gospels do not claim to be a complete biography of Jesus in accordance with the canons of modern historical science. From them, nevertheless, the face of the Nazarene emerges with a solid historical foundation. The Evangelists took pains to represent him on the basis of trustworthy testimonies which they gathered (Cf. Lk. 1:3) and working with documents which were subjected to careful ecclesial scrutiny.

THE LIFE OF FAITH

« “The disciples were glad when they saw the Lord” (Jn. 20:20). The face which the Apostles contemplated after the Resurrection was the same face of the Jesus with whom they had lived for almost three years, and who now convinced them of the astonishing truth of his new life by showing them “his hands and his side” (Ibid.). Of course it was not easy to believe. The disciples on their way to Emmaus believed only after a long spiritual journey (Cf. Lk. 24:13-35). The Apostle Thomas believed only after verifying for himself the marvellous event (Cf. Jn. 20:24-29). In fact, regardless of how much his body was seen or touched, only faith could fully enter the mystery of that face. This was an experience which the disciples must have already had during the historical life of Christ, in the questions which came to their minds whenever they felt challenged by his actions and his words.

JESUS IS ALTOGETHER OTHER!

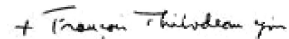
« One can never reach Jesus except by the path of faith, on a journey of which the stages seem to be indicated to us by the Gospel itself in the well known scene at Caesarea Philippi (Cf. Mt. 16:13-20). Engaging in a kind of first evaluation of his mission, Jesus asks his disciples what “people” think of him, and they answer him: “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets” (Mt. 16:14). A lofty response to be sure, but still a long way – by far – from the truth. The crowds are unable to sense a definitely exceptional religious dimension to this rabbi who speaks in such a spellbinding way, but they are not able to put him above those men of God who had distinguished the history of Israel. Jesus is really far different! It is precisely this further step of awareness, concerning as it does the deeper level of his being, which he expects from those who are close to him: “But who do you say I am?” (Mt. 16:15). Only the faith proclaimed by Peter, and with him by the Church in every age, truly goes to the heart, and touches the depth of the mystery: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” (Mt. 16:16).

WHENCE COMES THIS FAITH?

« How had Peter come to this faith? And what is asked of us, if we wish to follow in his footsteps with ever greater conviction? Matthew gives us an enlightening insight in the words with which Jesus accepts Peter's confession: “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven” (16:17). The expression “flesh and blood” is a reference to man and the common way of understanding things. In the case of Jesus, this common way is not enough. A grace of “revelation” is needed, which comes from the Father (Cf. Ibid.). Luke gives us an indication which points in the same direction when he notes that this dialogue with the disciples took place when Jesus “was praying alone” (Lk. 9:18). Both indications converge to make it clear that we cannot come to the fullness of contemplation of the Lord's face by our own efforts alone, but by allowing grace to take us by the hand. Only the experience of silence and prayer offers the proper setting for the growth and development of a true, faithful and consistent knowledge of that mystery which finds its culminating expression in the solemn proclamation by the Evangelist Saint John: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as the only Son from the Father” (1:14).

LIKE THOMAS

« We know that our concepts and our words are limited. The formula, though always human, is nonetheless carefully measured in its doctrinal content, and it enables us, albeit with trepidation, to gaze in some way into the depths of the mystery. Yes, Jesus is true God and true man! Like the Apostle Thomas, the Church is constantly invited by Christ to touch his wounds, to recognize, that is, the fullness of his humanity taken from Mary, given up to death, transfigured by the Resurrection: “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side” (Jn. 20:27). Like Thomas, the Church bows in adoration before the Risen One, clothed in the fullness of his divine splendour, and never ceases to exclaim: “My Lord and my God!” (Jn. 20:18) ». [Apostolic Letter translation by Zenit News Agency]



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