

## **12. The two coinciding poles of the Last Supper**

In the Last Supper, Jesus was concerned to make the disciples understand that the transmission of his person to the world is realized in communion, in the mystery of the communion of the disciples, which incarnates and reflects the Trinitarian Communion in the world. If there is ecclesial Communion, there is transmission of Christ, and if there is transmission of Christ, there is true communion in the Church and in humanity, that is, there is divine communion also among human beings. Fraternal communion transmits the divine Communion, Trinitarian Communion, to the world. Fraternal communion enables Jesus Christ to give his Body to the world, through the Church, the People of God whom communion keeps united as the one Body of Christ.

This mystery is as great as it is simple. We have a hard time grasping it, because it is absolutely simple, and we are not simple, we do not have a simple heart that grasps the mystery as it is and as it is manifested and transmitted in Christ. But the Spirit, if we desire it, if we demand it, transforms our heart little by little so that its eyes open to the Mystery, as one who comes out of a dark cave must habituate himself little by little to the light to see all the beauty and the colors of reality.

In the Gospel according to John, the entire last meeting of Jesus with his disciples in the Upper Room, the last Paschal Supper recounted in chapters thirteen through seventeen, takes place between the foot-washing and Jesus' priestly prayer. With the foot-washing Jesus performs a gesture that summarizes the meaning of his imminent passion and death, the meaning that his passion and death must have for his disciples, for the life of the Church. Then Jesus offers his disciples a summary of his teaching, in chapters fourteen to sixteen. In chapter seventeen Jesus no longer speaks directly to his disciples, but "lifting his eyes to heaven" (17:1), he begins a long prayer to the Father, the longest and most detailed prayer of Jesus to the Father that the Gospels recount. At the peak of his teaching Jesus wanted his disciples to hear from his own lips, or rather from his own heart, what he wants from the Father and together with the Father at the moment of handing his whole life over to him, to the point of death, for the Salvation of the world.

We cannot hear anything more important and sublime from Jesus than what he says to his Father. What the Son and the Father say to each other is the culmination of Revelation, because there can be no truth that is more true and sublime than the Word that the Persons of the Trinity exchange. It is like hearing the voice that resounds at the heart of Being, at the heart of the Reality of realities, spring and ocean of all that exists for creation. We should always keep a profound silence when we hear and meditate on these words of Eternity in time, in which the Eternal dialogues with Himself in time, speaks to Himself by letting himself be heard in time, by our human, temporal, and above all sinful ears and hearts.

Once, when I was still a university student, I found myself in church next to an old lady from my region who had suffered a great deal in life. Having become a little deaf, she whispered her prayer strongly enough that you could hear them. I never heard anyone pray so intensely, with absolute simplicity, putting the weight of such

sacrifices in each word, the weight of such crosses borne in faith. I found myself filled with silence and sacred respect, as if I had found myself near the Holy of Holies and heard not just the voice of the old lady but the voice of God who was responding to her, was in dialogue with her. Better yet: as if I perceived God the Father's bending down to put his ear near this old woman's prayers. It was like hearing the silence of God, the listening of God, that is, as God the Father listens to the Son and the Son to the Father, in the "breath of a light breeze" of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Kings 19:12).

Imagine, then, what it must have meant for the apostles to hear Jesus's long prayer to the Father on that dramatic evening of Holy Thursday. Who knows how awkward they felt, how unworthy! And also, what surprise! The paschal Supper had already begun with the surprise of seeing Jesus wash their feet, and now, at the end of the Supper Jesus surprises them again by starting to speak to the Father as if he were alone with Him.

We must not separate these two surprises, these two experiences that Christ wants us to have as well, because they are two essential experiences of his mystery and his mission, two experiences that He shares with the whole Church so that she can live them out and thus transmit Christ to the world. And they are experiences that we find connected in the gift of the Eucharist, in which Jesus makes us sharers in his filial communion with the Father and in his fraternal communion with us.

The humble love that he manifests and transmits in the foot-washing and the humble prayer that he addresses to the Father are the two axes of the communion that intersect and coincide in his Heart. We cannot adhere to Jesus Christ and transmit his presence and his love to the world without keeping the two poles of the Last Supper according to John connected: the foot-washing and the priestly prayer. They are not two opposed poles, but rather two extremes that come to coincide, because they already coincide in the love of Christ. The love of Christ is not divided for loving and serving us and loving and serving the Father. The love of Christ is precisely the coinciding of the love of God and the love of man. And just this coinciding is what Jesus wants to communicate and transmit to the disciples, so that they too, in his name, communicate it and transmit it to all.

Jesus says this explicitly to the disciples during the paschal Last Supper itself, the first Eucharistic supper: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Abide in my love!" (Jn 15:9). As if he had said: "I have loved you and I love you with the divine love that I exchange with the Father. If you remain in my love, you will remain in this coinciding of the love of God and love of neighbor."

In our life we can have no unity greater than that of being able to love God and our brothers with a single love. And this is precisely what I would like to continue to explore: this unity. And we shall see how here we also find the heart of the experience that St. Benedict wants to form in us.