

5. The sense of the things of Gods

“You are a scandal to me, for you think not as God thinks, but as men think!” (Mt 16:23). One could translate literally: “You are a scandal to me because you do not have the sense of what belongs to God, but what of what belongs to men”. St. Paul will say, in something of the same sense, but using another term: “We have the thought of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). This genitive of possession should orient us. To whom does my thought pertain, to whom does my judgment pertain, my feeling, whose is the sense of things, the “wisdom” that directs my life, my choices, my willing and not willing? Is it “of God” or “of men”, that is, worldly?

When Mary and Joseph found the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple, they reproached him for having taken a different path than the ordinary, normal one that they were following, for having made a choice that eluded their decisiveness. Jesus responded in a way somewhat like the way he corrected Peter: “Did you not know that I must occupy myself with the things of my Father?” (Lk 2:49), literally: “Did you not know that I must be in the things that are my Father’s?”

Jesus was completely within his belonging to the Father, and for this reason he remained in the Temple, just as he will remain wholly submissive to Mary and Joseph in Nazareth (2:51a), because his human family was also a *thing of his Father* to which he wanted to be present up to the end.

Well, it is this sense of belonging to the Father that Jesus asks of Peter and of those who are his, and he asks for it through to the depth of the heart, to thought that moves in us and determines our freedom, our choices, our decisions, our judgments, which then move a person’s speaking and acting. He asks for it even to the sense that we give ourselves and all of reality.

Note that when Jesus reminded his parents of the priority of his being entirely the Father’s, of his being entirely within his belonging to the Father, Mary immediately began an interior labor, a labor, therefore, of thought, of judgment, of conformity of her freedom to the truth revealed in the Son: “His mother kept all these things in her heart” (Lk 2:51b).

The boy left with them from Jerusalem right away, and was obedient to them, but for Mary the event as not just a bit of mischief that turned out fine, to be forgotten. Jesus’s words caused her to make a leap upward in awareness, in the position of her heart, in the sense of living, and of living with Him, and from this point she knew she could not turn backward, that in this she must follow Jesus to the end, because Jesus was also always progressing in his dedication to the things of his Father, even while remaining with them as before. The thoughts of Mary’s heart then guided her freedom all the more to follow Jesus’s obedience to the Father as the way of her vocation.

About twenty years later, Mary would not have reacted like Peter to the announcement of the Passion, because her whole life had formed God’s thoughts in her, more concerned with consenting than with knowing everything first. To have the sense of God’s things, in fact, means an availability of heart, an opening to God’s

plan, therefore a condition of freedom, a conception of one's own freedom, rather than an understanding or a conception of that which should or should not happen. It is a position of the heart, of freedom, in the present, which takes note of Christ now in order to follow him to the end in the future, which changes totally if my present gives itself over here and now to the things of God, to the sense of the things of God.

Think what a change of consciousness, what a deepening of awareness, the words of the twelve-year-old Jesus must have worked in Mary, and surely also in Joseph. It is stunning to think of it! Exteriorly everything remained the same, their daily life remained the same, such that no canonical Gospel reports any sort of novelty for almost another twenty years. They were certainly already aware of the mystery before, but up to that day Mary had meditated on the words of the angel, on what had happened at Bethlehem, or on the words of Simeon and Anna in the Temple, and Joseph, even quieter, had also meditated on the angel's words, and on the warnings given to him in dream to save the Baby. But up to that episode of the twelve-year-old Jesus nothing in particular had come from Jesus himself, the Gospels report no particular words or events, as the hagiographers love to create for the infancy of the saints.

That day in the Temple, behold, the Word of God opens his mouth, speaks, and says something that unsettles the normal course of their life, even if they were aware that he was the Messiah and the Son of God. Of course, Mary was always awaiting what would happen with Him. And yet, that day she was not expecting anything new, she was not expecting it like that. She lived through that circumstance and she spoke as any mother would have done, with the same anxiety, with the same anguish, perhaps even with the same impatient resentment, the same disorientation that parents feel before the inconsistencies of adolescents. It is Jesus who looks at her, who does not excuse himself, who already has the authority to demand of them an upward leap of sense, of awareness, who questions Mary and Joseph, calling them to a leap of adjustment to His vocation and mission. Just as will happen with Peter and the disciples when he will tell them that he will have to suffer, die, and rise to save the world. Peter needed a forceful reminder like a cannon-blast, he needed a punch in the gut to make this upward leap in sense, in awareness. For Mary and Joseph, already totally available for the Father's plan, already intent on listening to God, a gentle reminder was enough, a simple question, or rather two related questions: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must occupy myself with the things of my Father?" (Lk 2:49).

Luke adds: "But they did not understand the word that he had spoken to them" (2:50).

Then, as I was saying, normal life begins again right away, normal, daily, banal, silent, faithful, poor, hidden, for twenty years or more. "Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them" (Lk 2:51). And Luke immediately adds that Mary "treasured all these things [literally: all these *words*] in her heart" (*ibid.*).