

8. The joy of Christ

Christian joy, the joy of Christ, the joy He promises us, is a joy that is inseparable from charity. It is clear then that, if Jesus promises us joy, he does not promise us just any joy: he promises us *His* joy, which has its whole solidity in the love of God: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (Jn 15:9–11).

The fullness of *our* joy is the joy *of Christ* in us. This is something essential to understand and live out, essential and extraordinary.

Christ speaks to us of his love and of the Father’s, he tells us that in Their loving us we are granted the Trinitarian Love between the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit such that we can dwell in it, through obedience. And he tells us all this so that his joy can be in us and there can be a fullness of joy.

This also means that true joy, since it is the joy of Christ in us, is always a surprise. True joy is always the surprise of discovering a treasure, a pearl (cf. Mt 13:44–46). Joy is connected to the gift of a treasure. This means that joy lasts, or is rediscovered, is deepened, is renewed, in the measure in which the discovery of the treasure, the discovery of the pearl, lasts, is rediscovered, is deepened, is renewed.

“To discover” something is different than making it or creating it. It means stumbling into a great and beautiful reality that you feel is granted freely, even if to discover it you made a long journey, you labored in a long search. When you find the treasure, even if you dug with effort, you discover a gratuitous gift, which surpasses all that you could give in the search.

Let’s think for example of the Magi. What a long journey they made to get to Bethlehem! They knew that they would find a child, but when they get there they feel all the surprise of a gift that they had not forecast, a gift out of proportion to their long trip, out of proportion to what they had foreseen, prepared, projected.

“And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” (Mt 2:9–11)

The gifts of the Magi are out of proportion because they had been prepared as offerings to the son of a king. They came like the queen of Sheba to Solomon. Finding themselves in that house, in that poor home, probably half carved out of the rock and half built with walls, with some sheep or goat, some chickens, inside and outside, in that place stinking of manure, of smoke from the hearth, of homemade cheese... imagine how they must have felt out of place with gold in their hands, with their precious perfumes, incense and myrrh! They must have noticed an upside-down sense of disproportion.

It was not the smallness and poverty of Jesus and the Holy Family that did not stand comparison to the value of their gifts, of their persons. It was their gifts, their persons, the idea that they had gotten about the child, that did not withstand comparison to the value of what they discovered. So far they had always rejoiced to discover realities apparently more precious than themselves, like the stars they glimpsed in the sky. Now they stumbled upon a reality that apparently had no value compared to them, to what they were, knew, and possessed. And yet precisely the high point of apparent value that they had followed, the shining star, behold, it stopped there, halted, descended, and then disappeared above a place without value, "the place where the child was" (Mt 2:9).

The Magi could have gotten irritated, started laughing at the joke they had naively believed, started back off with all they had... a bit like Naaman the Syrian when he got mad because Elisha had sent him to bathe in the Jordan to heal his leprosy (cf. 2 Kings 5:11ff.).

Instead, what happens with the Magi? Why don't they leave? Why do they enter, prostrate themselves, and worship him, against all reasonability? A "great joy" comes upon the Magi. A joy that they feel when they see the star stopping. But it's two years they have been seeing this star, so it's not the star that is the cause of their joy. It's that the star stops and indicates a place, a destination, the end of all their heart's searching. The star's stopping reveals the presence of the Child. They had not seen him yet, they had not entered into the house, they had not yet seen anything, and still their heart already understands everything, has already entered before the Child, already feels the joy of meeting Him.

When they enter, as I was saying, they could have suffered a pang of tremendous disappointment, one of those disappointments that immediately kills joy. But no! "Going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him."

They enter, they see... and so far there is nothing special, so far everything is still possible for them, to stay or leave, to recognize or refuse, to love or despise. The strangest, most foolish decision springs up in them, most apparently inappropriate to the place they enter, most inappropriate to what they see: *they fall down and worship.*