

16. "That my joy may be in you"

"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)

"Abide in my love ... that my joy may be in you."

It is so important to Jesus to share with us what He himself holds most precious, most personal, most His own: love and joy. Love and joy: what does a person have that is more precious than this? Love and joy are each person's treasure, of the rich and the poor. The poor one has the advantage of having only this treasure, which makes it all the more precious to him. But often the conditions of misery and danger extinguish the joy of the poor and also their love.

Does the treasure of the love and joy of Christ endure the trial of poverty when it means misery, sickness, experience of hostility, of rejection, of scorn, of war, of hunger, of abandonment? Does the joy of Christ endure the challenge of pain, the challenge of hatred, the challenge of death? It is the question I have been asking myself since the beginning of our meditations. Is any joy possible when one finds oneself here in the midst of all the reasons not only not to rejoice, but also not to love?

What always comes to my mind is, in *The Diary of a Country Priest* by Georges Bernanos, the peak of the interior crisis of the young priest, when he realizes he is starting to enter into an insensitivity toward everything and everyone, without compassion, which isolates him from suffering humanity:

"I struggle to think of anguishes similar to mine. I feel no compassion for those unknown people. My solitude is complete, and I hate it. No devotion for myself.

If I did not have to love anymore!

[...] What I wouldn't give to be able to suffer! Pain too refuses me: the most habitual, the most humble, that of my stomach. I feel terribly well.

I do not fear death, it is as indifferent to me as life: and this is something that should not be expressed.

I seem to have gone all the way back along the whole path that I have traveled since God drew me out of nothingness. At first I was only this little spark, this speck of dust shining with divine charity. I am again nothing more than that, in the deepest Night. But the speck of dust hardly shines anymore, it's about to go out".

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith" (2 Cor 1:24). We will never be "coworkers for the joy" of others without letting ourselves be confronted directly by the challenge of evil that apparently wins out, especially over the weakest, the defenseless, the innocent.

Of course, there is a struggle for justice, a defense of the weak and the defenseless, from which we cannot withdraw ourselves, within the limits of our possibilities. But we know that the challenge for us is more profound, it is on a battle field that is

located in a space of human reality that is more profound than what is seen and sensed.

St. Paul explains this without mincing words in the letter to the Ephesians:

“Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.” (Eph 6:10–12)

How solid, true, powerful the force of good must be, of truth, of beauty, of joy, such that it can win this battle! To conquer as consolation, as the proposal of Christ who conquers this “present darkness” in which so many hearts are immersed. Faith makes us know and believe that Christ “descended into hell,” the Christ who had just died but who, as the Preface of the Easter Vigil puts it, “by dying destroyed death.” It is important to respond to the question of life and of joy that tacitly or furiously arises from those who find themselves imprisoned in the “present darkness,” like Dante in the dark wood, and who not only do not know how to get out, but think they can no longer get out, that this dark wood is the whole of reality. We must be aware that we are often called to be coworkers for a joy that is not there, that has gone out, that has been extinguished. How many times we find ourselves before people who suffer and who justly do not put up with consolations that are words, are theoretical, which pass over their sufferings without penetrating into them, without knowing how to penetrate them like the rain of spring manages delicately to water the ground that has become hard with winter. And yet, it is precisely to such people that we should bring the joy of Christ. Only the joy of Christ, not our own or that which we try to give rise to in them, can console the pain that cannot be taken away, the irreparable suffering like death. For the joy of Christ is a Paschal joy, a joy that rises back up even when evil, suffering, sin, and death have prevailed, have already taken everything away.

If we are called to collaborate toward the joy of others, it is not their joy we should be thinking about, but the joy of Christ in them, in us and in them. We are called to be collaborators for the joy of Christ.

And this means something fundamental, that we religious, or pastors and priests, often forget: our collaboration does not take place especially with the flock, with those who have been entrusted to us, but with Christ, with God. We are called, yes, to be collaborators for the joy of all, but before being with all, our collaboration is with the Lord.

This is an inversion of perspective that, if we accept it, if we live it out, would make our task and ministry, our mission, or our acceptance, very simple, and at the same time would make them effective, fruitful.

It is clear above all that one does not collaborate with the joy of Christ without collaborating with his love, without collaborating with the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the important thing is not to lose sight of what Jesus asks us to do in order to abide in his love. For this is the secret of Christian joy, ours and others’, ours along with the others.