

HE HUMBLLED HIMSELF, AND GOD HAS EXALTED HIM (Phil 2.5-11)

“Spirit of God, come and open the doors of our minds and our hearts to infinity. Open them definitively and keep us from the temptation to close them. Open them to the mystery of God and to the immensity of the universe. Open our intellect to the marvelous horizons of Divine Wisdom. Open our way of thinking..., our sympathy..., our affection..., our charity...” (Prayer of Jean Galot sj)

After having followed an approach to the Christological hymn of the letter to the Philippians 2.5-11, the Lord invites me to open the doors of my mind, my heart and my intelligence to the mystery of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For Paul, the quality of life in the community is based not on any appeal to benevolence, friendship or lots of good feelings, but on the very nature and action of God, on the imitation of Christ, revealer and executor of the Father’s plan of love for humanity. Jesus, God incarnate, Son and brother crucified and resurrected, is the model and, at the same time, the source of the renewed and liberated existence of Christians.

Paul places at the centre of the letter addressed to the Philippians a hymn already used in liturgical assemblies, with the aim of making them reflect on its profound meaning, of internalising its teaching and thus confirming them in the faith. Many questions arose in the minds of the Philippians; hesitations and delays impeded their spiritual and human progress. It is not easy for anyone to learn to put mistaken values and deceptions into perspective, to deny the freedom of morals, to free oneself from a superiority complex, to humbly place oneself at the service of one’s brother, to accept to always obey by putting aside one’s own will and one’s own ways of seeing.

“God, who for Christ’s sake gave you the grace not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him. This battle that you are fighting, you have seen me fighting, and now you hear that I am still fighting it” (Phil 1.29-30). Paul proposed to the Philippians yesterday, and to us today, a divine model, the Word incarnate in his self-humbling by assuming our human nature (Phil 1:27-2:11) to make his own

the will of the Father, namely the salvation of humankind. Jesus Christ adhered to it to the point of accepting death on the cross. Those who believe in Christ, if they wish and if they are able, are invited to collaborate in this marvellous plan.

I - Having the form of God, he did count equality with God a thing to be grasped. (Phil 2:6)

The Philippians were accustomed to feeling different and fortunate to live in a Roman colony, which enjoyed various privileges. The “privilege”, often sanctioned by an act of law emanating from the king, favours a private person or a category of people to enjoy certain advantages and honours compared to the common man. This can lead to discrimination, injustice and be a means of protecting the established power.

In the Trinity, there is no relationship between a superior and an inferior, by which the Father would grant the Son the privilege of the divine form. The three divine persons are equal and co-substantial as we profess in the act of faith.

Before the reform of the Roman Breviary desired by the Second Vatican Council, a reading of the Matinal of the memory of Saint Athanasius (May 2) recounted the Athanasian Creed of the fourth century. The cleric was invited to renew his faith in the Trinity with these words:

This is what the Catholic faith is: To venerate one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, Without confusing the persons or dividing the substance. The person of the Father is one, that of the Son is one, that of the Holy Spirit is one; But one is the divinity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, equal their glory, coeternal their majesty.

Such is the Father, such is the Son, such is the Holy Spirit. The Father is uncreated, the Son is uncreated, the Holy Spirit is uncreated. The Father is immense, the Son is immense, the Holy Spirit is immense. The Father is eternal, the Son is eternal, the Holy Spirit is eternal. And yet there are not three eternals, but one Eternal. Likewise, there are not three uncreated, nor three immense, but one uncreated and one immense. Likewise, the Father is almighty, the Son is almighty, the Holy Spirit is almighty. And yet there are not three almighty, but one almighty. Thus the Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God. And yet there are not three Gods, but one God. Thus the Father is Lord, the Son is Lord, the Holy Spirit is Lord. And yet there are not three Lords, but one Lord. [...] And in this Trinity nothing is prior or posterior, nothing is greater or less, but the three persons in their entirety are co-eternal and equal to one another. [...]

It is therefore true faith to believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, is God and man. He is God, being begotten of the substance of the Father before all time; he is man, being born in time of the substance of his mother. Perfect God and perfect man, composed of a rational soul and human flesh, Equal to the Father according to divinity, inferior to the Father according to humanity. [...] Amen.

It would be spiritually useful to reread, meditate calmly and pray with this Creed of Saint Athanasius. It highlights that Jesus Christ is truly in the condition of God, he did not consider it a privilege to be like God (Phil 2:6). He does not want to take advantage of his situation for himself.

II – To empty oneself and take on the condition of a servant (Phil 2:7)

The word “emptying” is dear to the Betharramites, although they are not always aware of the existential problem it poses. “Emptying” is the noun of the active verb “to

empty,” which indicates a work of destruction until nothing remains, until someone is rendered incapable of reacting, until all their dignity is robbed. On the other hand, by becoming incarnate, Christ remained true God and true man.

The Greek word is “*κένωση*” = to empty oneself and “*kenosis*” = result of this action. Paul uses this expression in this sense, with the aim of strengthening the relationships experienced within the Christian community: not the domination of some over others, but humble mutual service inspired by brotherly love. To empty oneself following the example of Christ.

He did not hesitate to renounce his glorious existence with God by assuming our human nature to reveal to us the face of the Father. And this by a free act, voluntarily desired, responsible in the face of the decisions to be made: to make himself a humble servant, to serve all men with disinterest, to suffer and die for the brothers to be saved.

From that moment, he always remained in a state of victim, humbled before God, doing nothing by himself, always acting by the Spirit of God, constantly abandoned to the orders of God to suffer and do whatever he wanted. (Saint Michael Garicoits, The Manifesto: founding text).

“To empty oneself” is to lower and humble oneself before God, freely, consciously, for a sublime mission. Jesus Christ was incarnated to announce and testify to all humanity the love of the Father. He was aware that the Father had entrusted him with the mission of saving humanity. Having made the Father’s will his own, being faithful to this mission was a requirement for him. This fidelity included not taking advantage of his divine equality, emptying himself of his own will, assuming the condition of a servant, offering his own life.

Oh! if our whole being, our body and soul, had only one movement, one generous impulse, to place itself under the guidance of the Spirit of love, saying unceasingly: Here I am, ecce venio. (MS 146)

“Emptying oneself” is not a self-destruction of the mind, heart and will to the point of destroying one’s personality. Scripture shows that Jesus of Nazareth does not lose the divine attributes; they are not placed at his own service, but at the service of the glorification of the Father. It is enough to recall the immutability of thought and will, the omniscience in the praise of faith in the one who addresses Him for a miracle, in the reproach to Judas for his treacherous kiss, in the fact of dismantling Peter’s enthusiasm by predicting his betrayal, the omnipotence in the healing of the blind and the sick, in the expulsion of demons, in the resurrection of the dead. I leave to each one the pleasure of searching in the Gospel the corresponding verses.

III. He assumed the condition of a servant

In the Western world and in a modern mentality, the word “servant” is not understood if it is opposed to the concept of “freedom”. In the Semitic and biblical world, the “servant” is a person who belongs to another person. It is not the lack of freedom that qualifies the servant, but *belonging*. Indeed, the king’s advisers, ambassadors and superintendents, as well as the subject peoples, are called “servants” (1 Sam 16:15; 2 Sam 10:19; 15:34, 1 Re 11:26; Ge 9:11).

Without changing the fundamental meaning, there are different ways of conceiving of belonging and different ways of understanding the expression “servant of God”. The people of Israel are called “servants of God”; they belong to God and this is why the Lord undertakes to free them (Jer 30:10). The believer experiences that his existence

is in the hands of God, of the one who receives life, healing, freedom, maintenance, protection, help (Ps 34:23; 69:37; 119:17.23. 135.140.176). Moses is the one who faithfully transmits the will of God in history. David, like every king, belongs to God and it is to him that God has entrusted the task of saving the people from their enemies (2 Sam 3:18; Ez 34:23-24). Job is presented as the one who submits, not passively, to the will of God. He is the man who seeks God and for this reason belongs to him (Gb 1:8; 2:3; 42:7-8). In the first song of Isaiah 42:1-7, the “servant” is called by God to carry out a divine plan of salvation in weakness, humility and darkness, respecting and supporting the least and the weak. In the second song (Is 49:1-9), the Lord guarantees success to the servant who experiences the discomfort of the apparent failure of his mission: today humiliated, tomorrow he will be glorified by his people before the nations. In the third song (Is 50:4-11), the servant is violently persecuted; but the Lord is with him and his resistance is due to divine strength. His death is a welcome sacrifice and the life that flows from it is a gift not only for the servant, but also for the sinners for whom the servant had offered his life (Is 52:13-53:12). In light of this, I can better understand the mission, death and resurrection of Jesus.

He is the Son of God: *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (Mt 3:17)... *“Listen to him”* (Lk 9:35). He is a servant who seeks the lost sheep; he came for the sick and sinners, he is in solidarity with the least, on the roads and towards the villages and cities even outside the borders of Israel. He remained faithful to the mission received from the Father. For some, he speaks with authority, while others mock him and seek a reason to kill him.

“Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess, ‘Jesus Christ is Lord,’ to the glory of God the Father.” (Phil 2:9-11)

IV. For personal and community reflection

- a) To what extent am I able to accept a God who made himself poor, who is hungry, naked, offended, defeated on the cross? Does this God disturb my way of considering myself as a privileged person and superior to others because I am a religious and a priest?
- b) Renouncing privileges in order to love better. Faced with the proposal of a new mission, do I allow myself to be seized by the anguish of losing acquired privileges and the comfort of a life without worries and without too many sacrifices?
- c) Accepting ‘to get my hands dirty’ in order to serve better. When I meet an unfortunate, disfigured, emaciated, dirty, wounded, shy brother, what is my reaction? Am I able to see in him the face of Jesus Christ?

“God wants instruments stripped of everything, especially of themselves, whose hearts abandon themselves completely to the action of the Holy Spirit, to the law of love and charity... and to the great law of obedience” (DS 45-46) in a free, responsible and available way.



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