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Where God is Hidden

In the discreet silence of the Sacraments, Jesus waits for us to freely open our heart to Him.

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Early in the morning, after a night spent praying on the Mount of Olives, Jesus goes to the Temple in Jerusalem. A large crowd quickly gathers around Him and He begins to teach them. Suddenly a loud commotion takes place. A woman caught with a man who is not her husband is dragged and brought

before Jesus. It is easy to imagine his sorrow on seeing the suffering of that poor woman and the blindness of those men. How little they know their Father God! Their real purpose is to lay a trap for Jesus. *Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?* (Jn 8:5).

They aren't really interested in the answer. Using God's law as their instrument, they want to justify the sentence they had already dictated. Hence they are incapable of understanding our Lord's eloquent gesture: *Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground* (Jn 8:6). Then standing up He tells them: *Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her* (Jn 8:7). And He bends down and begins to write again in the dust under his feet.

Discreet deeds and gestures

Just as in our own life, the Son of God acts in this scene with discreet gestures. What He writes on the ground remains hidden to us. He doesn't want to specify a correct interpretation of the Law of Moses in a way that is not open to doubt, as they were asking of Him. Jesus "did not change history by pressuring anyone or by a flood of words, but by the gift of His life. He did not wait until we were good before He loved us, but gave himself freely to us. And holiness is nothing other than preserving this gratuitous gift."[1]

Perhaps we have often asked ourselves: why doesn't God make himself known more clearly, why doesn't He speak more loudly? We may have even felt the temptation to rebel against this way of acting and sought to "correct" it. Benedict XVI warned us against this temptation: "While the Lord, on the mountain, was giving the Law to Moses, at the

bottom of the mountain the people were violating it. Unable to endure waiting and the absence of their mediator, the Israelites turned to Aaron: ‘make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him’ (*Ex 32:1*). Weary of the journey with an invisible God, now that Moses, their mediator, had disappeared, the people clamored for a tangible presence of the Lord, and in the calf of molten metal made by Aaron found a god made accessible, manageable and within human reach. This is a constant temptation on the journey of faith: to avoid the divine mystery by constructing a comprehensible ‘god’ who corresponds with one’s own plans, one’s own projects.”[2]

We don’t want to fall prey to this temptation ourselves. We want to be amazed at and adore God hidden in

the situations we encounter each day, in the persons around us, in the Sacraments we frequently receive, especially Confession and the Holy Eucharist. We want to encounter Jesus in this world of ours where He writes with his own hand words of affection and hope. And so we ask Him to help us understand his reasons for acting in this way, to give us the wisdom needed to value the mystery of his exquisite respect for our freedom.

When God seems too “vulnerable”

We may find ourselves unsettled by this divine way of acting. We might think that such silence makes it very easy for God’s “rights” to be trodden upon, that it is too much of a risk and makes Him too vulnerable. But God has truly given us all the freedom needed to choose our own path – each one’s so different from another’s – with our will helped by

his grace. If at times we can offend God, it is not because He is too vulnerable. On the contrary, he is very trusting, very free in the relationships He establishes with us. It might seem “easy” to fail to give Him the love He is worthy of, but that is because He has wanted to “place his heart on the ground” so that we can tread softly. Our Lord is more hurt by the harm we do to ourselves than by the offense we give Him. Jesus tells the women He meets on his way to Calvary: *Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children (Lk 23:28.31).*

In the Gospel scene of the woman taken in adultery, we see that Jesus doesn't become angry either with the woman who had sinned or with her accusers who were laying a trap for him. Even when we leave no room for Him in our heart, He doesn't leave us and turn his back on us. God

always stays near us, quietly, hidden in the Sacraments, with the hope that as soon as possible we will once again allow Him to dwell fully in our soul.

It is true that, since Jesus offers us his love time and again, we may often fail Him. He even accepts willingly the immense wound we cause in his Heart, if it becomes the door through which we can enter and rest in his Love. Jesus assured us: *my yoke is easy, and my burden is light* (Mt 11:30). But we can fail to appreciate such immense goodness and even react, perhaps unconsciously, with unbelief. Saint Josemaria said that people often “break the gentle yoke; they throw off their burden, a wonderful burden of holiness and justice, of grace and love and peace. Love makes them angry; they laugh at the gentle goodness of a God who will not call his legions of angels to defend Him.”[3]

Confession is close by

Returning to the scene in the Temple, we see that although the woman had failed to respect her own dignity, her accusers were unable to recognize in her a daughter of God. But Christ looks at her in another light. What a difference between Jesus' way of looking and our own! "To me, to you, to each one of us, He says to us today. 'I love you and will always love you; you are precious in my eyes.'"[4]

Saint Teresa of Avila confided: "Often do I think, my Christ, how delectably and happily Thine eyes rest on those who love Thee, when Thou, my Good, art pleased to look upon them with love. I think that even one such gentle look bestowed upon souls whom Thou countest as Thine own is sufficient reward for many years of service."[5] Christ's look is not a superficial glance but a deep and understanding look filled with hope. "Listen to how you were loved when

you were unlovable; listen to how you were loved when you were awkward and ugly, before anything in you was worthy of love. You were loved first in order to make you worthy of being loved.”[6]

In the Sacrament of Confession we come to realize that for Jesus repentance is enough for Him to trust that we love Him. It is enough in Peter’s case and also in our own: *Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you (Jn 21:17)*. When we approach the confessional with the words and gestures that give form to the Sacrament, we are saying to Jesus: “I have offended you once again. I have once again sought happiness outside of you; I have rejected your love. But Lord, you know that I love you.” Then, like that woman, we hear Jesus say: *Neither do I condemn you (Jn 8:11)*. And we are filled with peace.

If we sometimes think that God has taken few “precautions” to prevent us from offending Him, we should realize that He has made it even easier for us to be forgiven by Him. A Father of the Church puts these words on Jesus’ lips: “This Cross is not my stab but the stab of death. These nails do not inflict pain on Me. They increase in me my love for you. These wounds do not provoke me to cry; instead they make you come deeper into my heart. My body by being extended on the Cross embraces you all with a stretched-out heart; yet My suffering does not increase. My blood is not for me a loss; rather, it is the payment of your worth.”[7]

Hence when we see how God treats us with so much refinement and love, we want to respond in the same way. The mere possibility of abusing such confidence causes us pain. We don’t want to “devalue” the sacred,

making it just a routine to be fulfilled at certain times. The Sacrament of Confession has been won with the Blood of Christ, and we want to show our gratitude, also with our deeds. We want to always be attentive to God's offer of forgiveness, by which any obstacle can be removed that prevents us from sensing God's loving look and his hope for us for the future.

Jesus' Mass is our Mass

Saint Thomas Aquinas expressed the value of the salvation won by Christ on Calvary in this way: "By suffering out of love and obedience, Christ gave more to God than was required to compensate for the offenses of the whole human race. First of all, because of the exceeding charity from which He suffered; secondly, on account of the dignity of His life which He laid down in atonement, for it was the life of one who was

God and man; thirdly, on account of the extent of the Passion, and the greatness of the grief endured.”[8] And we can offer the same salvific offering as if it were our own, since Christ makes it ours again each day at Mass. Saint Josemaria liked to say that it is “our Mass,” the Mass of each of us and of Jesus.[9] How easy it is to be co-redeemers, if we want to! How easy it is, with Him, to change the course of history!

Saint Augustine commented on the Gospel scene we are meditating on: “The two were left alone, the wretched woman and Mercy ... When the others had all left, and that woman was left alone, He raised His eyes to the woman. We have heard the voice of justice, let us also hear the voice of clemency.”[10] That woman is no longer alone in her struggle. She will always sense that look of Jesus accompanying her.

When we sense Jesus' merciful and loving look, we never want to separate ourselves from Him: "I have tasted and I die of hunger and thirst."[11] How natural it is, then, to want to treat Him with refinement and respect when He is present in the Eucharist. This is not merely a matter of good manners or courtesy. It is true affection, shown in the way we receive Him in Holy Communion, in our silence before the Tabernacle, in our careful genuflections. These are all opportunities to correspond to so much love poured out for each of us by our Lord. They are signs of the interior purity we are seeking and that we have so often asked our Lady for when praying spiritual communions.

In the Holy Mass we experience in a special way that "when He asks us for something, in reality He is offering us a gift. We are not the ones doing Him a favor. It is God who

illuminates our life, filling it with meaning.”[12] How much thanks we would like to give to God for putting sanctity so clearly within our reach! Thus, it is easy to see ourselves, like that woman, sent forth with new hope by Jesus: *go, and do not sin again (Jn 8:11)*. This is the best possible news that woman could have received. Jesus tells her that sin is not inevitable; it is not her destiny and doesn’t have the final word. No one now condemns her. Why must she condemn herself? Now she knows that, strengthened by Jesus, she can return and make her husband happy, and be very happy herself.

Diego Zalbidea

[1] Francis, Homily at Christmas Eve Mass, 24 December 2019.

[2] Benedict XVI, Audience, 1 June 2011.

[3] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 185.

[4] Francis, Homily at Christmas Eve Mass, 24 December 2019.

[5] Saint Teresa of Avila, *Exclamations of the Soul to God*, 14.

[6] Saint Augustine, *Sermon 142*.

[7] Saint Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 108*.

[8] Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, q. 48, a. 2.

[9] Saint Josemaria, *The Way*, no. 533.

[10] Saint Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of Saint John*, 33, 5-6.

[11] Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, X, 38.

[12] Fernando Ocariz, *Light To See, Strength To Want To*, published in *Aleteia*, 20 September 2018.

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