

“When are you able to say ‘Today was a beautiful day’? When have you truly had fun?”

“TRACES OF THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE”

7. Lord of the word – The good shepherd

Luigi Giussani

LORD OF THE WORD

He had an irresistible, intelligent way of discussing matters. The Pharisees and the Scribes were renowned for their dialectic; however, before Him they were powerless.

Then the Pharisees went away to devise a way to trap Him in what He said. And they sent their disciples to Him, together with the Herodians, to say, “Master, we know that you are an honest man and teach the way of God in an honest way, and that you are not afraid of anyone, because a man’s rank means nothing to you. Tell us your opinion, then. Is it permissible to pay taxes to Caesar or not?” But Jesus was aware of their malice and replied, “You hypocrites! Why do you set this trap for me? Let me see the money you pay the tax with.” They handed him a denarius, and he said, “Whose head is this? Whose name?” “Caesar’s,” they replied. He then said to them, “Very well, give back to Caesar what belongs to Caesar—and to God what belongs to God.” This reply took them by surprise, and they left Him alone and went away.

“At daybreak He appeared in the temple again; and as all the people came to Him, He sat down and began to teach them.

The Scribes and Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, ‘Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?’ They asked Him this as a test, looking for something to use against Him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with His finger. As they persisted with their question, He looked up and said, ‘If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.’ Then He bent down and wrote on the ground again. When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest.”¹

The trap is sprung and it challenges their hypocrisy.

The Master’s word is so compelling and so difficult not to take seriously that it is over- »

¹ John 8:2-9.

* Source: *The Journey to Truth Is an Experience*,
McGill-Queen’s University Press, Montreal 2006, pp. 62-64.

» whelming and even paralyzing: "The police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who said to them, 'Why haven't you brought Him?' The police replied, 'No one has ever spoken like Him.'"²

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

But another characteristic distinguishes Him. Those powerful people who can fathom our psyche, who speak from their chairs of learning, are seldom very good. He, instead, "took a little child and set him by his side."³ And again, "Now soon afterward He went to a town called Nain, accompanied by His disciples and a great number of people. When He was near the gate of the town it happened that a dead man was being carried out for burial, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople were with her. When the Lord saw her He felt sorry for her. 'Do not cry,' He said. Then He went up and put His hand on the bier and the bearers stood still, and He said, 'Young man, I tell you to get up,' and the dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him to his mother."⁴

The experience of goodness is the encounter with an attitude that values and enhances us and gives us hope for what we shall become; it is "peace on earth," for God is good. And God is good because He saves us. Redemption is the announcement of the positive in life.

Before those who see Him there so tall and powerful, He inclines himself over a flower in the field and describes its "garb"; He always speaks kindly and sensitively of the sun and rain. Not: "How dreary, it's raining today," or "the sun is really bothering me." And His attention towards man is full of infinite understanding, unreservedly friendly and affectionate: even all the hairs of your head are counted.

He has compassion for those in grief and is unable to dine without first having healed. He cries over Lazarus and weeps over the city.

And He was human not only because of His fondness for nature or even the most insignificant details of an individual, or because He was so affectionate but also because He could share in human joy. It is particularly meaningful that He should attribute a special value to sharing a meal. The greatest act of His religion is identified with a meal. The kingdom is often compared to a banquet and the final glory is described as sitting at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁵

² John 7:45-6.

³ Luke 9:47; see Mark 9:36, 10:16.

⁴ Luke 7:11-15.

⁵ See Karl Adam, *Christ Our Brother*. New York: Collier Books 1931, chapter 1.