



3rd Month: DECEMBER

LISTENING TO CHRIST, WHO IS THE WORD FROM THE FATHER

From the Gospel according to Matthew (11:25-28)

At that time Jesus said, "I give praise to you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the learned and you have revealed them to the little ones. Yes, O Father, for thus you have decided in your goodness. Everything has been given to me by my Father.

No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son will reveal it.

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke over you and learn from me, who am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your life. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light".

Jesus was faced with the closed-mindedness of those who rejected the novelty of the Gospel in the name of traditions and of an intellectualistic reading of the Old Testament. Rather he presented to them a revelation that could be made to those who were considered the least, because they were less well off, not very cultured and - according to those teachers - incapable of receiving and proclaiming the mystery of God. These two categories are quite well known, the fake wise men on one side and the little ones on the other. We, too could easily fit among either of them. For example, we might be vain, or indeed feel overwhelmed by life.

Jesus' message is for each and all of us, indistinctly. His new kind of revelation is not based on rules nor on prophecies. Ultimately it rests on the true relationship that each one of us can establish with Jesus Himself. He states that "no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and he to whom the Son wishes to reveal him".

When we wish to meditate on the Holy Scriptures, we are not going to find a philosophy nor any abstract principles, rather we are in for a personal encounter with Christ. His Word is effective, it is alive and it works in us. Celebrating the Word made flesh, means, as John says, welcoming that new Light that is Christ Himself. Those who have accepted it within themselves, "are given the power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12).

From a letter from Padre Pio to Raffaolina Cerase

Pietrelcina, 14th July 1914, Epist. II, p. 127-128

Unite your heart to the heart of Jesus and be simple of heart, just as He wants you to be. Strive to portray in yourselves the simplicity of Jesus, keeping your hearts away from worldly prudence, from fake attitudes linked to the flesh. Strive to always have pure thoughts in your minds, always upright ideas, always holy intentions. Your will then should always seek nothing but God, his taste, his glory, his honour.

My beloved, let us mirror ourselves in Jesus, who enjoys leading a hidden life. All his infinite majesty is hidden in the shadows and silence of that modest little shop in Nazareth. So let us also endeavour to lead an entirely internal, hidden life in God.

The Latin word simplex is made up of a root, sem, meaning 'one', and the verb plectere, which means 'to bend'; in practice, 'simple' (in Latin simplex) means bent only once.



*“Indulge in reading holy books...
they are like pasture to the soul and a great support on the way to perfection”*

Contrary, then, to what one might imagine, the simple is not someone we know immediately, without any effort; it is not something or someone that everyone sees, but in order to make themselves known, the simple person needs a gesture, that of opening the sheet folded in half.

Padre Pio wants to help Raffaolina's spiritual journey by recommending she should imitate the simplicity of Jesus. By doing so, he does not suggest an easy task. The simplicity to which he refers to is quite a demanding thing to put into practice. In order to achieve it, she will have to overcome the stereotyped image of Jesus, which might even move us to tears when we think about Him at Christmas or during His Passion, as it ultimately does not touch us deeply at all.

To understand Jesus one must look at him with simplicity, that is, open up that mystery hidden in his humanity and find in it a full and total obedience to the Father's will. Jesus' total surrender and faithfulness to the Will of the Father must become all believers' way of life, in their choice to simply (and totally) follow the Lord.

The whole of the New Testament presents this hiding character as the great value of the Incarnation; God identifies Himself with the life of man, not only by conforming His way of being to us, but by "hiding" Himself in our humanity.

This is the "kenosis", or lowering of which Philippians 2 speaks about. It is the choice of those who follow the gospel, who want to be mirrored in Jesus and hide themselves from the eyes of others.

We have met the Lord

"And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). It is not easy to fully appreciate the beauty of this text, if one does not enter the mindset of those who prayed, simply wrote and lived the pages of the Old Testament before Christ was born. The sacred authors did not bother to speculate on God, they looked at him as he presented himself: he was the Word, the creative, saving, merciful Word.

Let us think of the powerful, prodigious Word in the Exodus. Let us bring to mind the word as bearer of hope in the pages of the prophets. We thus come to realise that the verse in John's Gospel - "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14) - represents the fulfilment of a promise.

There is definitely a difference between this Word as it is narrated in the pages of the Old Testament, and the Word in the New Testament, where it can be seen, it becomes flesh, it can be touched, it sits down to eat, it suffers and dies like us. This is also a Word that comes alive again and even gives life through the Resurrection.

This is what we mean when we say that when reading the Holy Scriptures one does not seek rules to improve their life, nor to find any edifying stories. What happens when we read the Holy Scriptures, is the meeting with a specific, extraordinary person, the Lord Jesus.

At this point, the Word that we read and meditate on becomes a mediating instrument that enables us to go beyond what we see (Jesus as a man) and recognise Jesus as our God. The Scriptures help us to adore the Child, as the Magi do. The Scriptures make us say with the centurion under the cross: 'This one is truly the son of God'. We can also add that it is the Scriptures that help us to get to "mirror ourselves" in Christ, just as Padre Pio suggested, so as to compare our existence to Jesus' own existence.

The Word of the living God

In this regard Padre Pio is very clear. In the letter we have quoted, Padre Pio was very understanding towards his spiritual daughter. He realised that at times of temptation, and spiritual dryness, or even in the face of opposition, it is difficult to encounter Jesus. We often look to the Sacred Scriptures for the magic word to solve our problems.



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Listening to and meditating on the Word has a rather different end. Padre Pio wrote: "It is sad, I know, the state of the soul placed in such straits and it truly seems to us that everything is over for us and that the Lord has finally withdrawn from us because he is tired of bearing with us. The thing is actually quite different. Never has the Lord been so pleased with us as at this very moment. He has been there all the time, near us, indeed within us, invisibly animating us to bear with our fight. Therefore, rest assured, for the Lord will fight for you and will never withdraw from you". The Word of God has precisely this purpose: it opens our hearts to the relationship with God and to the knowledge of His presence.

Imagining Jesus' life

One of the first pieces of advice we are given when we are learning how to meditate is to picture some scenes from the life of Jesus in our mind.

St Teresa wrote: "...let us meditate on a passage of the Passion, for example, the one of the Lord being scourged at the pillar. Our intellect will ponder on the reasons behind the great pains and sorrow that our Majesty suffered in that state of abandonment, which can easily be understood. If we are clever enough, it will also be easy for us to understand quite a few more points from this passage, and this is also true if we are learned people. This is the way we are all recommended to follow when we pray, at the beginning, and as a continuation, as it is an excellent and worthy path in the highest degree, until the Lord elevates us to more supernatural things".

From the testimonies of Padre Pio's first spiritual daughters, we know that he was very good at supporting them in this direction.

Today not everyone considers these methods as still viable, some prefer to strictly keep to the text and go deeper into the meaning of every word. Everyone will choose the methods they prefer, the important thing is to accept the idea that Jesus is the place of our communication with God, and this is not just a verbal communication. All is good in Jesus, and He gives Himself totally to us, so that we can do good, too.

It is therefore essential that we listen to the Word of God: He who speaks – God – and they who listen – men – must build a relationship which is very similar to that of the potter who is moulding his vases in clay.

The Word becomes flesh

The Word that becomes flesh in Christ demands that everyone should have the humility to learn how to speak with God. It is a dialogue that is not only meant to be an invocation, or the request for a blessing, but it should also involve a release of the Word. All too often what God says to us takes the shape of our own justifications or our projects. We may hear an inner voice, we invoke the Spirit, we feel that the Word is suggesting something to us, but not always what comes to our minds is the result of our free acceptance. That is why group discernment is important – just as Padre Pio recommended. Each Prayer Group should be led by a priest.

Our meditation on the Word requires us to celebrate the coming of God in the way He wants to present Himself, and not according to our own interpretation of the faith, according to the small or large concessions we make to ourselves.

Padre Pio invites Raffaolina to detach herself "from certain little affections that do not appear to the soul as such, in fact many of them are not even known and felt by the soul". When the Word of God is meditated together and presented under the guidance of a priest, it leads us to live the truth of the Gospel together.



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JESUS IS THE FULLNESS OF REVELATION

From the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei Verbum. no. 4

After having repeatedly, and in many ways, spoken through the prophets, God "finally, in our day, has spoken to us through the Son" (Heb 1:1-2). For he sent his Son, the eternal Word, who enlightens all men, that he might dwell among men and explain to them the secrets of God (cf. Jn 1:1-18).

Jesus Christ therefore, the Word made flesh, sent as "man to men" [3], "speaks the words of God" (Jn 3:34) and brings to completion the work of salvation which was entrusted to him by the Father (cf. Jn 5:36; 17:4). Therefore when we see Him, we also see the Father, (cf. Jn 14:9), by the very fact of his presence and by the manifestation that he makes of himself by word and deed, by signs and miracles, and especially by his death and resurrection from among the dead, and finally with the sending of the Spirit of truth, he fulfils and completes the Revelation and validates it with the divine testimony, that God is with us to deliver us from the darkness of sin and death and to resurrect us to eternal life. The Christian economy therefore, is the new and ultimate Covenant, which will never pass away, and no other public Revelation is to be expected before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Tim 6:14 and Tit 2:13).

PRAYER TO SAINT PIUS BY MONS. MICHELE CASTORO

O Glorious Padre Pio
humble and faithful servant of the Lamb,
you followed Him to the cross
offering yourself as a victim for our sins.
United with Him and filled with His love
bring the glad tidings of his Resurrection to the poor and the sick,
and show us the merciful face of God, the Father.
O tireless workman, friend of God,
bless all those who work and support
your House for the Relief of Suffering
and guide your Prayer Groups from Heaven,
that they may be beacons of light
in this tormented world and spread everywhere
the fragrance of your charity.
O Saint of Paradise
obtain for us from the Most High health of body and spirit,
peace in families and consistency in our Christian life,
that we may one day deserve to enter the blessed homeland with you.
Amen