

LOW SUNDAY

(Jn. 20:19-31) **TRACK A 049**

[Poem Vol. 5, pp. 739-47, 749-51, 753-6; Gospel Vol. 10, pp. 287-97, 299-301, 302-5]

(It is Easter Sunday night, and in the absence of Thomas, the ten remaining apostles are gathered in the Supper room, discussing what they would say, upon seeing Jesus again. Peter is distraught at having denied Jesus, and John tells him not to be afraid – saying that one would think Peter did not know Jesus. Suddenly, while they are talking...)

The room lights up brightly, as if there were a dazzling flash. The apostles cover their faces, fearing it is lightning. But they hear no noise, and they raise their heads.

Jesus is in the middle of the room, near the table. He stretches out His arms saying: « Peace be with you. »

No one replies. Some look paler, some flush, they all look at Him with fear and embarrassment. They are fascinated, and at the same time they are almost anxious to run away.

Jesus takes a step forward, smiling more brightly. « But do not be so afraid! It is I. Why are you so upset? Were you not wishing to see Me? Did I not let you know that I would come? Did I not tell you on Passover evening? »

No one dares to open his mouth. Peter is already weeping, and John is already smiling, while Jesus' two cousins, with shining eyes and lips that tremble without uttering a word, look like two statues...

« Why do you have in your hearts, thoughts that are in such contrast between doubt and faith, love and fear? Why do you still want to be flesh, and not spirit, and only with the latter can you see, understand, judge, act? Have your old egos not been completely burnt by the flame of sorrow, and have your new egos not risen to a new life? I am Jesus. Your Jesus, Who has risen from the dead, as He had said. Look, John, you have seen My wounds. And all of you, who are not aware of My torture. Because what you know is quite different from the exact knowledge that John has. Come John, be the first. You are already completely cleansed. So cleansed that you can touch Me without fear. Love, obedience, loyalty had already cleansed you. My Blood, which wetted you completely when you took Me down from the Cross, has finished cleansing you. Look. These are real hands and real wounds. Look at My feet. Can you see that the mark is that of the nail? Yes. It is really I, and not a ghost. Touch Me. Ghosts do not have bodies. I have real flesh on a real skeleton. » He lays His Hand on the head of John, who has dared to approach Him: « Can you feel it? It is warm and heavy. » He breathes on his face: « And this is My breath. »

« Oh! my Lord! » John whispers in a low voice...

« Yes. Your Lord. John, do not weep out of fear and desire. Come to Me. I am always the one who loves you. Let us sit down, as usual, at the table. Have you nothing to eat? Well, give it to Me. »

Andrew and Matthew, with the gestures of sleep-walkers, take bread and fish from the sideboards, and a tray with a honeycomb, a corner of which has just been nibbled at.

Jesus offers the food, and eats, and gives each of them a little of what He eats. And He looks at them. He is so kind and so majestic, that they are paralysed.

James, John's brother, is the first who dares to speak: « Why do You look at us like that? »

« Because I want to know you. »

« Do You not know us yet? »

« As you do not know Me. If you knew Me, you would know Who I am and how I love you. And you would find words to tell Me your torture. You are silent, as if you were before a mighty stranger of whom you are afraid. Not long ago you were speaking... For almost four days you have been talking to yourselves, saying: "I will say this to Him... saying to My Spirit: "Come back, Lord, that I may tell You this". Now I have come, and you are silent? Have I changed so much that I no longer seem Myself to you? Or have you changed so much that you no longer love Me? »

John, sitting near his Jesus, makes the usual gesture of laying his head on His chest, while he whispers: « I love You, my God », but he becomes stiff, preventing such abandon out of respect for the shining Son of God. Because Jesus seems to be shedding a light, although His Body is like ours.

But Jesus clasps him to His Heart, and then John opens the floodgates to his blissful tears. And it is the sign for everybody to do the same.

Peter, two seats behind John, falls on his knees between the table and the seat, and he weeps, shouting: « Forgive me, forgive me! Take me out of this hell in which I have been for so many hours. Tell me that You have seen my error for what it was. Not of the spirit, but of the flesh that overwhelmed my heart. Tell me that You have seen my repentance... It will last until my death. But... but do tell me that I must not fear You as Jesus... and I, and I... I will try to behave so well, as to make God forgive me also... and die... having only a long purgatory to suffer. »

« Come here, Simon of Jonah. »

« I am afraid. »

« Come here. Don't be cowardly any longer. »

« I do not deserve to come near You. »

« Come here... What has Satan done to you to blind you so much?... If you do not look at Me now... never again will you be able to come to your Lord without fear. And then what will happen to you? You sinned out of presumption. Do you want now to sin again out of obstinacy? Come, I tell you. »

Peter drags himself along on his knees, between the table and the seats, covering his weeping face with his hands. Jesus stops him when he is at His feet, by laying His Hand on his head.

Peter, weeping more bitterly, takes that Hand and kisses it, amid hearty sobs, and without restraint. He can only say: « Forgive me! Forgive me! »

Jesus frees Himself from his grip, and lifting the chin of the apostle with His hand, He compels him to raise his head, and He stares at Peter's reddened, burnt eyes - tortured by repentance - with His own clear bright Eyes. He seems to be wishing to pierce his soul. He then says: « Come on. Remove the shame of Judas from Me. Kiss Me where he kissed Me. Wash, with your kiss, the sign of betrayal. »

Peter raises his head, while Jesus bends even more - and he lightly touches the cheek of Jesus... then he rests his head on Jesus' knees and remains like that... like an old child who has done wrong, but is forgiven.

The others, who now see Jesus' kindness, become somewhat daring, and they approach Him, as best they can.

His cousins are the first to come... They would like to say so much, but they do not succeed in saying anything. Jesus caresses them and encourages them with His smile.

Matthew comes with Andrew. Matthew says: « As in Capernaum... », and Andrew: « I... I love You, I do. »

Bartholomew comes, moaning: « I was not wise, but foolish. He is wise » and he points at the Zealot, at whom Jesus is already smiling.

James of Zebedee comes, and he whispers to John: « You should tell Him... »; and Jesus turns round and says: « You have said it for four evenings, and I have pitied you all that time. »

Philip, the last, comes completely stooped. Jesus compels him to raise his head, and says to him: « Greater courage is required to preach the Christ. »

They are now all around Jesus. They pluck up courage little by little. They find again what they had lost, or had feared they had lost for good. Confidence and tranquillity come to light again, and although Jesus is so majestic as to make His apostles have a new respect for Him, they at long last find the courage to speak.

(One by one they tell Jesus what is in their hearts and minds, while Jesus listens in silence. His cousin James, and Andrew, ask why they weren't given the strength to stay beside Him. Simon the Zealot (whom Jesus had requested not to be in Jerusalem after His arrest, but to gather the disciples together afterwards) pleads not to be asked for this sort of obedience again. Philip tells Jesus how he lost his reason and found himself in Jericho. Bartholomew also seemed to have lost his mind, and both he and James of Zebedee couldn't understand how Lazarus was able to keep his peace. Judas Thaddeus, Andrew and Matthew describe Lazarus as having been like a lighthouse, who must have been given much by Jesus – perhaps a different soul, after being raised from the dead. Then John describes Martha and the Magdalene as having been like lighthouses also. He says:)

« They have exceeded us in love. That is why they have been what they have been. »

Jesus smiles and is always silent.

« But they have received a great reward for it... »

« You appeared to them. »

« To the three of them. »

« To Mary immediately after Your Mother... »

It is clear that the apostles have a regret for these privileged apparitions.

« Mary, for so many hours, has known that You had risen. And we can only see You now... »

« Yes. Why to the women, and in particular to Mary? You also touched her forehead, and she says that she seems to be wearing an eternal crown. And to us, Your apostles, nothing... »

Jesus no longer smiles. His Face is not upset, but He has stopped smiling. He looks gravely at Peter - who was the last to speak, recovering boldness as his fear vanishes - and He says:

« I had twelve apostles. And I loved them with all My Heart. I had chosen them, and like a mother I took care to bring them up in My Life. I had no secrets from them. I told them everything, I explained everything. I forgave everything. Their humanity, their thoughtlessness, and their stubbornness... everything. And I had some disciples. Some rich and some poor disciples. I had women with a gloomy past or of a delicate constitution. But the apostles were the favourite ones.

My hour came. One betrayed Me and handed Me over to the executioners. Three slept while I was sweating blood. All of them, with the exception of two, ran away cowardly. One denied Me out of fear, although he had the example of another one, who was young and faithful. And, as if it were not enough, among the twelve I had a desperate suicide, and there was one who doubted My forgiveness so much, that only with difficulty and through maternal words, he believed in God's Mercy. So that, if I had looked at My group, if I had looked at it with human eyes, I should have said: "With the exception of John, faithful out of love, and of Simon Zealot, faithful to obedience, I no longer have disciples". That is what I should have said, while I was suffering in the enclosure of the Temple, in the Praetorium, along the streets, on the Cross.

I had some women... And one, the most guilty in the past, has been, as John said, the flame that has joined together the broken fibres of hearts. That woman is Mary of Magdala. You denied Me and you ran away. She defied death to be close to Me. When they insulted her, she uncovered her face, ready to receive spittle and slaps, considering that by doing so, she would resemble her crucified King more. And when people sneered at her from the depth of their hearts - because of her firm faith in My Resurrection - she continued to believe. Although tortured, she took action. When she was desolate this morning she said: "I will divest myself of everything, but give me my Master". Can you still dare to ask Me: "Why to her?"

I had some poor disciples: the shepherds. I did not approach them very often, and yet how able they were, to acknowledge Me with their faithfulness!

I had some shy women disciples, like all the Hebrew women. And yet they left their homes, and amid a tremendous crowd of people that cursed Me, they came to give Me that assistance that My apostles had denied Me.

I had some heathen women who admired Me as a "philosopher". Such I was for them. But the mighty Roman ladies were able to lower themselves to Hebrew customs, to say to Me, in the hour that I was forsaken by a world of ungrateful people: "We are friends of Yours. "

My face was covered with spittle and blood. Tears and perspiration dripped on My wounds. Filth and dust encrusted them. Whose hands cleansed Me? Yours? Or yours? Or yours? None of your hands. This man was near My Mother. This one was gathering together the scattered sheep. You. And if My sheep were scattered, how could they help Me? You were concealing your faces, because you were afraid of the scorn of the world, while your Master was covered with the contempt of all the world. And He was innocent.

I was thirsty. Yes. You had better know that also. I was dying of thirst. I had nothing but a temperature and pain. My Blood had already been shed in Gethsemane, drawn by the grief of being betrayed, forsaken, denied, beaten, overwhelmed by the infinite sins, and by God's severity. And it had been shed in the Praetorium... Who thought of giving Me a drop of water for My parched throat? A hand of Israel? No. The pity of a heathen. The same hand that, by an eternal decree, opened My chest - to show that My Heart already had a mortal wound, the one made by lack of love, by cowardice, and by the betrayal. A heathen. I remind you: "I was thirsty and you gave Me drink". There was not even one person in the whole of Israel, who gave Me comfort - either out of lack of possibility to do so - as in the case of My Mother and the faithful women - or because of bad will. And for the Unknown One, a heathen found the pity that My people had denied Me. In Heaven, he will find the sip he gave Me.

I solemnly tell you, that while I refused all comforts - because when one is a Victim one must not mitigate one's destiny - I did not want to reject the heathen, in whose offer I tasted the sweetness of all the love that will come to Me from the Gentiles, as compensation for the bitterness Israel gave Me. It did not quench My thirst, but it relieved My dejection. That is why I took that ignored sip. To draw to Me: him who was already inclined towards Good. May he be blessed by the Father, for his pity!

Are you no longer speaking? Why do you not continue to ask Me why I acted so. Do you not dare ask? I will tell you. I will tell you everything of the whys of this hour.

Who are you? My continuators. Yes, you are, notwithstanding your bewilderment. What are you to do? To convert the world to Christ. Convert it! It is the most delicate and difficult matter, My friends. Indignation, disgust, pride, excessive zeal, are all harmful to success. But, as nothing, and nobody, would induce you to be kind, complying, and charitable with those who are in darkness, it has been necessary - do you understand? - it has been necessary for you, once and for all, to crush your pride - a pride of Hebrews, of males, of apostles - to make room only for the true wisdom of your ministry: meekness, patience, compassion, and love without ostentation and disgust.

You can see that everybody - among those whom you looked at with scorn or with proud indulgence - has exceeded you in believing and in acting.

Everybody: the woman who had sinned in the past; Lazarus, imbued with profane culture, the first who in My Name has forgiven and guided; the heathen ladies; Chuza's delicate wife - delicate? she really surpasses all of you!, the first martyr of My faith; the soldiers of Rome; the shepherds; the Herodian Manaen; and even Gamaliel, the rabbi.

Do not start, John. Do you think that My Spirit was in darkness? All of you. And I say this, so that in future - remembering your error - you may not close your hearts to those who come to the Cross.

I tell you. And I know that - although I tell you - you will not do it until the Strength of the Lord bends you like twigs to My Will, which is to have Christians all over the Earth. I defeated Death. But it is not so hard as old Hebraism. And I will bend you.

You, Peter. Instead of weeping dejectedly, since you are to be the Stone of My Church, have these bitter truths engraved in your heart. Myrrh is used to preserve from corruption. So, become imbued with myrrh. And when you want to close your heart, and the Church, to someone of a different faith, remember that it was not Israel, it was not Israel, it was not Israel, but it was Rome that defended Me and took pity on Me. Remember that not you, but a woman, a sinner, remained at the foot of the Cross, and deserved to be the first to see Me. And in order not to be worthy of reproach, be the imitator of your God. Open your heart and the Church, saying: "I, poor Peter, cannot despise anybody. Because if I do, I shall be despised by God, and my error will become alive once again in His eyes". Woe to you, if I had not broken you so! You would not have become a shepherd, but a wolf. »

Jesus stands up. He looks most imposing.

« My children. I will speak to you again, while I remain among you. But in the meantime, I absolve you and I forgive you. May the peace of forgiveness come to you, after the trial, that, although humiliating and cruel, has been beneficial and necessary. And with this peace in your hearts, become once again My faithful strong friends. The Father sent Me into the world. I send you into the world to continue My evangelization. All kinds of miseries will come to you, asking for relief.

Be kind, thinking of your misery when you remained without your Jesus. Be enlightened. It is not possible to see in darkness. Be pure to give purity. Be love, to love.

Then He will come, Who is Light, Purification and Love. But in the meantime, to prepare you for your ministry, I communicate the Holy Spirit to you. For those whose sins you forgive, they will be forgiven. For those whose sins you retain, they will be retained.

May your experience make you just in judging. May the Holy Spirit make you saints, so that you may sanctify. And may your sincere wish to overcome your faults make you heroes for the life expecting you.

What is still to be said, I will tell you when your absent companion has come. Pray for him. Remain with My peace, without being upset by doubts about My love. »

And Jesus disappears as He had come, leaving an empty place between John and Peter. He disappears in a flash that is so bright, that it makes the apostles close their eyes. And when their dazzled eyes are opened again, they find that only Jesus' peace is left, a flame that burns, and cures, and consumes the bitterness of the past, in only one desire: to serve.

(It is some time later. How long afterwards, is not clear. The ten apostles are again in the house of the Last Supper...)

There is a knock at the main door. They all become silent and listen. And they utter an « oh! » of surprise when they see Elias (the shepherd disciple) come into the hall with Thomas. Such a strange Thomas, that he seems another person.

His companions crowd around him, shouting their joy: « Do you know that He has risen and has come? And He is waiting for you, so that He may come back! »

« Yes. Elias told me. But I do not believe it. I believe what I see. And I see that it is the end for us. I see that we are all scattered.»

(A despondent Thomas describes how he ran away, wandering about the Judaeen mountains, and ending up at the Grotto in Bethlehem, crying. This was where Elias - who had gone there for his own consolation - found him. Thomas would not believe Elias when told that Jesus had risen, but Elias insisted, and brought him to the apostles. As Elias leaves the group, one of the apostles says:)

« Thomas: He has risen. I am telling you. He was with us. He ate some food. He spoke. He blessed us. He forgave us. He has given us the power to forgive. Oh! why did you not come before? »

Thomas does not shake off his dejection. He stubbornly shakes his head. « I do not believe. You have seen a ghost. You are all mad. The women first of all. A dead man does not rise by himself. »

« A man, no. But He is God. We have kissed Him, we have seen Him eat, we have heard His voice, we have felt His hand, we have seen His wounds! »

« No. I do not believe it. I cannot believe. I should see in order to believe. If I do not see the holes of the nails in His hands, and if I do not put my finger into them, if I do not touch the wounds of His feet, and if I do not put my hand where the lance opened His chest, I will not believe. I am not a child or a woman. I want evidence. I reject what my reason cannot accept. And I cannot accept your word. »

« But Thomas! Do you think that we want to deceive you? »

(But Thomas will listen only through his human reason. He tells them he does not believe in the Resurrection, and can only believe, by seeing for himself.

It is now eight days later, and the apostles are together again in the Supper room, this time with Thomas. They are gathered around the Passover table, leaving empty the seat that Jesus had occupied. John is serving some food, and suddenly, he sees the Lord...)

He is standing with His arms along the sides of His Body - a little detached from it - but with His Hands towards the floor, and the palms towards the apostles. The two wounds of His Hands are like two diamond stars, from which two very bright beams issue. I do not see His Feet, covered by His tunic, or His Chest. But from the fabric of His garment - which is not an earthly one - light emanates, where the divine Wounds are concealed...

Nobody else had become aware of the apparition... They look in the same direction as he is looking, and they see Jesus. They all stand up, deeply moved and happy, and they rush

towards Him, as He - smiling more brightly - advances towards them, walking now on the floor, like all mortals.

Jesus, Who previously looked fixedly only at John... (now) looks at them all, and says: « Peace to you. »...

The only one who has remained a little further away, somewhat embarrassed, is Thomas. He is on his knees near the table. But he dare not come forward. On the contrary, he seems to be trying to hide behind the corner of the table.

Jesus stretches out His Hands to be kissed, while the apostles seek them with holy loving eagerness. He looks around at the lowered heads, as if He were looking for the eleventh. (He has actually seen him from the very beginning, and He is behaving so, only to give Thomas time to pluck up courage and come forward.) When He sees that the incredulous apostle dare not do so... He calls him: « Thomas. Come here. »

Thomas raises his head, embarrassed, almost in tears, but he dare not go. He lowers his head again.

Jesus takes a few steps towards him and repeats: « Come here, Thomas. » Jesus' voice is more authoritative than the first time.

Thomas stands up reluctantly, abashed, and goes towards Jesus.

« Here is the man who does not believe unless he sees! » exclaims Jesus. But in His voice there is the smile of forgiveness.

Thomas seems to feel this smile, he dares to look at Jesus, and sees that He is really smiling. So he musters up courage and walks faster.

« Come here, quite close to Me. Look. Put your finger, if it is not sufficient for you to look, into the wounds of your Master. »

Jesus has stretched out His Hands, then He has opened His tunic on His chest, uncovering the gash on His Side. No light now emanates from the Wounds... which now appear in their bloody reality: two irregular holes - the left one of which extends as far as the thumb - and they pierce a wrist, and a palm at its base. And there is a long gash, which in the upper part is lightly curved like a circumflex accent, on His Side.

Thomas trembles, looks but does not touch. He moves his lips, but is not able to speak clearly.

« Give Me your hand, Thomas » says Jesus so kindly. And with His right hand, He takes the right one of the apostle, He grasps his forefinger, and takes it towards the hole of His left Hand, He thrusts it well into the hole, to make him feel that His palm has been pierced. Then from His Hand He takes it to His Side, He grasps the four fingers of Thomas, at their base, at the metacarpus, and puts those four big fingers into the gash of His Side, making them go in deeply, not limiting Himself to leaning them against its edge,

and He holds them there, looking fixedly at Thomas - a severe yet kind look - while he continues to say: « ... Put your finger here, put your fingers and also your hand - if you wish so - into My Side, and do not doubt, but believe. » That is what He says, while doing what I have said previously.

It would appear that the closeness of the divine Heart, which Thomas almost touches, has communicated courage to him. He succeeds, at last, in speaking and uttering words. Falling on his knees with his arms raised, and bursting into tears of repentance, he says: « My Lord and My God! » He cannot say anything else.

Jesus forgives him. He lays His right hand on Thomas' head and replies: « Thomas, Thomas! You believe now, because you have seen... But blessed are those who will believe in Me without seeing! Which reward shall I have to give them, if I have to reward you, whose faith has been assisted by the power of seeing?... »

Then Jesus lays His arm on John's shoulder, He takes Peter by the hand, and approaches the table. He sits at His place. They are now sitting as they were on Passover evening. But Jesus wants Thomas to sit next to John.

« Eat, My friends » says Jesus. But no one is hungry any more. Joy fills them. The joy of contemplation.