

OCTAVE OF THE EPIPHANY /BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

(Jn 1: 29-34) *(Audio Year A Track 010)*

(*Poem* Vol. 1, pp. 243-4, Vol. 3, pp. 255-6 – *Gospel* Vol. 1, pp. 289-90, Vol. 5, pp. 179-80;

Notebooks 1944, p. 391; *Notebooks 1945-50*, pp. 358, 551)

(At the age of 30, Jesus has left His Mother Mary at Nazareth, and begins the three years of His public life. Maria Valtorta describes a vision she sees on the right bank of the river Jordan, where John the Baptist is standing on a rock, addressing a crowd of people - some are ordinary, some rich, and some appear to be Pharisees, because their tunics are adorned with fringes and braids...)

He is announcing the Messiah, and exhorting the people to prepare their hearts for His coming, eradicating all obstructions and rectifying their thoughts. But it is a violent and harsh speech. The Precursor does not possess the light hand that Jesus uses, to cure the wounds of hearts. He is a doctor who lays the wound bare, scrutinises it, and cuts it mercilessly.

[I am not repeating the words, because they are related by the Evangelists, but here they are amplified...]

While I am listening, I see my Jesus proceeding along a path, at the edge of the grassy shady strip alongside the Jordan. This rustic road - more a path than a road - seems to have been opened by the caravans and the people who, throughout years and centuries, passed along to a point where it is easy to wade across, because the water is very shallow. The path continues on the other side of the river, and disappears from sight in the green strip of the other bank.

Jesus is alone. He is walking slowly, and coming forward behind the Baptist. He approaches noiselessly, and listens to the thundering voice of the Penitent of the desert. It is as if Jesus were one of the many, coming to John to be baptised and purified, for the coming of the Messiah. There is nothing to distinguish Jesus from the others. His clothes are those of common people, and there is no divine sign discriminating Him from the crowd. But He has the bearing and handsomeness of a gentleman.

It would appear that John senses a special spirituality emanate from behind. He turns around, and at once identifies the source. He descends impulsively from the rocky pulpit, and moves quickly towards Jesus, Who has stopped a few yards away from the crowd, and is leaning against the trunk of a tree.

Jesus and John stare at each other for a moment: Jesus, with His very sweet blue eyes; John with his very severe black flashing ones. Seen from nearby, one is the antithesis of the other. They are both tall - their only resemblance - but for all the rest, they differ immensely.

Jesus is fair haired. His hair is long and tidy, His face is white ivory, His eyes blue, His garment simple, but majestic.

John is hairy: his straight, black hair falls unevenly onto his shoulders; his sparse dark beard covers his face almost completely, but his cheeks, hollowed by fasting, are still noticeable; his feverish eyes are black; his complexion is dark, tanned by the sun and weather-beaten; his body is covered with hairs; he is half-naked in his camel-hair garment - which is tied to his waist by a leather belt and covers his trunk, reaching down to his thin sides - whilst his right side is uncovered and bare, completely weather-beaten.

They look like a savage and an angel, seen close together.

John, after scrutinising Him with his piercing eyes, exclaims: "Here is the Lamb of God. How is it that my Lord comes to me?"

Jesus replies calmly: "To fulfill the penitential rite."

"Never, my Lord. I must come to You to be sanctified, and You are coming to me?"

And Jesus, laying His hand on the head of John - who had bowed down in front of Him - replies: "Let it be done as I wish, that all justice may be fulfilled. Your rite may become the beginning of a higher mystery, and men may be informed that the Victim is in the world."

John looks at Him with his eyes sweetened by tears, and leads Jesus towards the bank of the river. Jesus takes off His mantle and tunic, and is left with a pair of short trousers. He then descends into the water where John is. John baptises Him, pouring - on His head - some water from the river by means of a cup (which looks like a shell) tied to his belt.

Jesus is really the Lamb. A Lamb in the whiteness of His flesh, in the modesty of His gestures, in the meekness of His look.

Jesus climbs on to the bank, and after putting on His clothes, He concentrates on praying. John points Him out to the crowd, and testifies that he recognised Him by the sign that the Spirit of God had shown him, as an infallible means of identifying the Redeemer.

I am enraptured, watching Jesus pray, and seeing His bright figure against the green of the river bank.

(Two years later, during a visit with some of the other apostles to Antioch, Andrew, the quiet one, reminisces to an assembled group about the meeting of Jesus with John the Baptist...)

"I was a disciple of the Baptist. And when we were not fishing, I used to go to him with other companions. It was a day of this month... The banks of the Jordan were crowded with people, who trembled when hearing the words of the Baptist. I had noticed a young handsome man come calmly towards us along a path. His garments were plain, His countenance kind. He seemed to be asking for love, and to be giving love. His blue eyes rested for a moment on me, and I felt something that I have never felt again. I felt as if my soul were being caressed, as if I were being lightly touched by the wings of angels. For a moment I felt that I was so far away from the earth, so different, that I said: "I shall die now! This is God calling my soul". But I did not die. I was fascinated, contemplating the young unknown man, whose blue eyes were now staring at the Baptist.

The Baptist turned around, ran to Him, and bowed. They spoke to each other. And as John's voice was as loud as thunder, their mysterious words reached me, tense as I was in the keen desire to know who the unknown young man was. My soul felt that He was different from everybody. They were saying to each other: "I should be baptised by You... and ... Never mind just now. It is necessary to fulfil all justice"...

John had already said: "Someone will come, and I am not fit to undo the straps of His sandals". He had already said: "There is among you, in Israel, One Whom you do not know. His winnowing-fan is already in His hand. He will clear His threshing-floor, and He will burn the chaff in a fire that will never go out". I had in front of me a young man of the common people, whose countenance was mild and humble, and yet I felt that He was the One, Whose sandal-straps not even the Holy One in Israel - the last Prophet, the Precursor - was fit to undo. I felt that He was the One, Whom we did not know.

But I was not afraid. On the contrary, when John, after the enrapturing thunder of God, and after the unimaginable brightness of the Light in the shape of a dove of peace, said: "Here is the Lamb of God", I cried: "I believe!" with the voice of my soul, rejoicing because I had foreseen the King Messiah in the young man who looked so mild and humble. Because of this faith I am His servant. Be so yourselves, and you will have peace..."

(There may be a little bit of John the Baptist in all of us. Jesus says:)

"...You humble yourselves to the point of annihilation, saying, 'How do You, Lord, come to me? I am not worthy to have You.' But it is precisely because you feed on this loving humiliation that the Divine Guest comes and makes his dwelling in you. There He finds love, humility, and upright will. And what else does God want, to love you? Nothing. He knows that you cannot give more, as long as you are down below..."

(Jesus says to Maria Valtorta:)

"...Jam-packed for the approaching Feast of Unleavened Bread, many people... - Israelites mixed with Gentiles, Jews with proselytes, and disciples with enemies of Christ - heard the testimony by my Father...

Three times... in three different times, places, and circumstances, the Father bore witness to Me, without ever retracting... It was a Voice - always with the same power, and quite different from mine and from that of every other man - which thundered from the Heavens to bear the same witness to Me. And it is a sign that I was really God, like the Father. God the Father can therefore be said: to glory in only one Son - like Him, having begotten Him; and to take pleasure in Him, seeing that He is perfect as He, the Father is: by Divine Nature; and in terms of will and grace in the human nature taken on...

But to this threefold perceptible witnessing, there should be added the testimony of the greatest miracles worked by Christ: almost always after calling upon the Father. It may truly be stated that the invisible presence of the Father - who is eternal, most pure Spirit - shone forth like a ray of uncontainable light, which no obstacle could imprison in every manifestation of Christ - whether as a Teacher, or as a worker of miracles and divine actions..."
