

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

(Matthew 22: 34b-46)

(*Poem*, Vol. 5, pp. 437-8, Vol. 1, pp. 712-7; *Gospel* Vol. 9, pp. 408-10, Vol. 2, pp. 367-72;
Autobiography, p. 335)

(It is now Wednesday morning, the day before Holy Thursday, when the Passion of Jesus begins...)

Jesus enters into the Temple, which is more crowded than on the previous days. He is all dressed in white, in His linen garments. It is a sultry day.

He goes to the Court of Israel to worship, followed by a train of people, while other people have already taken the best places under the porches. The majority of these others are Gentiles, who, not being allowed to go beyond the first court - the Court of the Gentiles - have taken advantage of the fact that the Hebrews have followed the Christ...

But a large group of Pharisees upsets them: they are always arrogant in their behaviour, and they push through the crowd overbearingly, to approach Jesus, Who is bent over a sick man. They wait until He has cured him, then they send a scribe to question Him.

Actually, they had a short discussion first, because Joel (named Alamo) wanted to go to question the Master. But a Pharisee objected, and the others supported him, saying: 'No, we know that you side with the Rabbi, although you do so secretly. Let Uriah go...'

'Not Uriah' says another young scribe, whom I do not know. 'Uriah is too harsh in speaking. He would provoke the crowd. I will go.'

And without listening any more to the protests of the others, the young scribe approaches the Master, just when Jesus is dismissing the sick man, saying to him: 'Have faith. You are cured. Your fever and pain will not come back any more.'

The young scribe asks: 'Master, which is the greatest commandment of the Law?'

Jesus - Who was facing the other way - turns round and looks at him. A faint luminous smile brightens His face, He then raises His head... He looks round at the crowd, He stares at the group of Pharisees and doctors, and He notices the pale face of Joel, who is half hidden behind a big sumptuously dressed Pharisee. His smile brightens. It is like a light that caresses the honest scribe. He then lowers His head - looking at his (not so tall) questioner - and replies to him: 'The first of all the commandments is: "Listen, Israel: the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength". That is the first, and greatest commandment. The second resembles it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself". There are no greater commandments than these two. They comprise all the Law, and the prophets.'

'Master, You have replied wisely and truthfully. It is so. There is only one God, and there is no other god except Him. To love Him with all our hearts, with all our intelligence, with all our souls and all our strength, and to love our neighbour as ourselves is worth much more than any holocaust and sacrifice. I seriously think so, when I meditate on David's words: "Holocausts give You no pleasure; a contrite heart is the sacrifice pleasing to God".'

And Jesus says: 'You are not far from the Kingdom of God, because you have understood which holocaust is pleasing to God.'

The scribe then asks in a low voice, as if he were speaking of a secret: 'But which is the most perfect holocaust?'

Jesus beams with love, letting this pearl drop into the heart of this man who is open to His doctrine, to the doctrine of the Kingdom of God. And bending over him, He says: 'The perfect holocaust is to love, as ourselves, those who persecute us and not bear any grudge. Whoever does that will possess peace. It is said: the lowly shall possess the Earth, and shall enjoy the abundance of peace. I solemnly tell you that he who can love his enemies, reaches perfection and possesses God.'

The scribe greets Him respectfully, and goes back to his group, who reproach him in low voices for praising the Master. And they angrily say to him: 'What did you ask Him secretly? Have you been seduced by Him as well?'

'I heard the Spirit of God speak from His lips.'

'You are silly. Do you perhaps think that He is the Christ?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Truly, before long we shall see the schools of our scribes empty, while they go roving after that Man! But how can you see the Christ in Him?'

'I do not know how. I know that I feel that it is He.'

'You're mad!' they say. And they turn their backs on him...

(In a wintery place, at the end of the first year of His public life, Jesus is giving His final talk in a series of lessons on the Ten Commandments, to a group of assembled pilgrims. He says:)

'My children in the Lord, the Feast of Purification is now at hand, and I, the Light of the world, am sending you prepared with the minimum necessities to celebrate it properly...

I did not crush you under the numberless formulae which now oppress the believers, and which are an obstacle against the true Law... By their very oppression, they cause the believers to lose sight of the unswerving clear and holy voice of the Lord, Who says: "Do not curse. Do not idolise. Do not desecrate the festivals. Do not dishonour your parents. Do not kill. Do not fornicate. Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not covet other people's belongings. Do not covet your neighbour's wife". Ten prohibitions. Not one more. And they are the ten columns of the temple of the soul.

Above these columns shines the gold of the holiest precept: "Love your God. Love your neighbour". It is the coronation of the temple. It is the protection of its foundations. It is the glory of its builder.

Without love, one could not keep the ten rules. and the columns would fall: all of them, or some. And the temple would crash: all of it, or part. But it would always be a ruin, and no longer suitable to receive the Most Holy.

Do what I told you, knock down the three lusts. Be sincere in giving a name to your vices, as God is sincere in saying to you: "Do not do this or that"... Whoever loves something more than he loves God - whatever that love may be - is an idolater. Whoever invokes God, professing himself God's servant and then does not obey God, is a rebel. Whoever, out of greed, works on the Sabbath - is a distrustful, presumptuous desecrator. Whoever refuses help to his parents - advancing excuses... is one who is hated by God, Who put fathers and mothers as His image on the earth. Whoever kills is always a murderer. Whoever fornicates is always lustful. Whoever steals is always a thief. Whoever lies is always vile. Whoever covets what is not his, is always a greedy loathsome glutton. Whoever desecrates a nuptial bed is always filthy...

But there is no sin that God will not forgive, if the sinner is really repentant. Have faith in the Divine Bounty. If you were able to understand what that Bounty is - even if all the sins of the world were upon you - you would not flee from God. On the contrary you would run to His feet. Because only the Most Good One can forgive what man does not forgive...

Come! Let us go to the Lord. I in front, you behind. Let us go to the wholesome water, to the holy pastures, to the land of God. Forget the past. Smile at the future. Do not worry about the mud, look at the stars. Do not say: "I am darkness"; say: "God is Light".

I have come to announce peace to you, to give the Good News to the meek, to cure those whose hearts are crushed by too many things, to preach freedom to all the slaves, (and first of all: to the slaves of Mammon), and to free prisoners from lust...

Celebrate the Feast of Purification with a new spirit. And may the light of God shine within You.'

The conclusion of Jesus' speech has been overwhelming. His eyes were shining in His bright face, and His smile and voice were of a gentleness never known before.

The people are almost fascinated, and they do not move until He repeats: 'Go. Peace be with you.' The pilgrims then start to leave, speaking among themselves...

(In her Autobiography, Maria Valtorta writes:)

When I read the scribe's dialogue with the Master... I feel a boundless thrust descending into me. Yes, I have loved God with all my strength, with even more than my strength, for I have loved Him to the point of dying. I have loved my neighbour more than myself, for I pray and suffer for him, abandoning - to the goodness of God - concern about my eternal future, without accumulating selfish treasures for myself. I thus hear the divine, dear Voice saying to me, 'You are not far from the Kingdom of God...'

'Come, come, divine Beauty to which I cling, so as to suffer better and better. May the veils be removed which still conceal your Perfection from me, O sweet Love. And after the cross, let the joy come, of being with You...'