

## **SUNDAY WITHIN THE CHRISTMAS OCTAVE**

(LK. 2:33-40) (*Audio Year B Track 005*)

(*Poem*, Vol. 1, pp. 160-3, Vol. 4, pp. 126-7; *Gospel* Vol. 1, pp. 193-7, Vol. 7, pp. 33-4; *Notebooks* 1943, p. 531; *Poem* Vol. 4, p. 828; *Gospel* Vol. 8, p. 371)

**(*Maria Valtorta describes the vision she sees:*)** I see a couple of people departing from a very modest house. A very young mother comes down an outside staircase, holding in her arms a child, enveloped in a white cloth.

I recognise our Mother. She is always the same: pale and blonde, agile, and so kind in Her behaviour. She is dressed in white, with a pale blue mantle, and a white veil on Her head. She is carrying Her Child so carefully.

Joseph is waiting for Her at the foot of the steps, with a little grey donkey. Joseph is dressed entirely in light brown: both his tunic and his mantle being the same colour. He looks at Mary, and smiles at Her. When Mary arrives near the little donkey, Joseph places the animal's bridle on his left arm, holds for a moment the Child - Who is sleeping peacefully - allowing Mary to sit more comfortably on the donkey's saddle. He then hands Jesus back to Her, and they set out.

Joseph is walking beside Mary, holding the bridle all the time, and ensuring that the donkey goes straight on, without stumbling. Mary is holding Jesus in Her lap, and lest He might feel cold, She spreads the edge of Her mantle over Him. Joseph and Mary speak very little, but they often smile at each other.

The road - which is not a model road - winds along the country made barren by the season of the year. Only a few other travellers meet them on the road, or overtake them.

Then I see some houses, and the walls around a town. They go in through a gate, and start walking on the pavement which is all broken up, and very irregular. Progress is now much more difficult, both because the traffic often causes the donkey to stop, and because the holes - where stones are missing - make the poor animal jerk continuously, disturbing Mary and the Child.

The road is slightly uphill, narrow, and running between high houses, which have small narrow low doors, and only a few windows at road level. High above, the sky can be seen, with many thin blue strips between the houses, nay, between the terraces. Down in the street, there are many people, and much shouting. They meet other people who are on foot, riding donkeys, or leading loaded donkeys. And there is a crowd following a cumbersome camel caravan. At a certain moment, a patrol of Roman legionaries passes by, with a great noise of hooves and arms. They disappear beyond an arch, built across the narrow, stony road.

Joseph turns left along a wider and more pleasant road. I can see the embattled town walls - with which I am already familiar - at the end of the street.

Mary dismounts from the little donkey, near a gate where there is a stall for other donkeys. I say "stall" because it is like a shed, or better still, a kind of shed, spread with straw. There are also some poles with rings to which the animals are tied.

Joseph gives some coins to a little man who has gone up to him. He buys some hay, and draws a pail of water from a rustic well in the corner. He feeds the donkey, then joins Mary, and they both enter the enclosure of the Temple.

At first, they turn their steps towards an arcade where the merchants are. (There, Jesus will later give a good lashing to the sellers of lambs and doves, and to the money-changers.) Joseph buys two little white pigeons. He does not change any money - obviously he has what is required.

They then make for a side door, above eight steps - as all the doors seem to have, because the centre of the Temple is raised above the surrounding ground. The door opens into a great hall - like the doors of our houses in towns - only this one is larger and more ornate. In the hall - on the right and on the left - are two kinds of altars. They are two rectangular constructions, the purpose of which I do not understand at first. They are like low basins, because the internal part is lower than the external rim, which is a few centimetres higher.

A priest approaches them. I do not know whether he was called by Joseph, or whether he came of his own accord. Mary offers Her two little pigeons, and since I know their fate, I turn my eyes elsewhere. I am watching the decorations on the very heavy portal, on the ceiling, and around the hall. But I get the impression - by a side glance - that the priest sprays Mary with some water. It must be water, because I do not see any stains on Her dress. Then Mary - Who had given the priest a handful of coins, together with the two pigeons - goes into the real Temple, in the company of the priest.

I am watching everything. It is a most ornate place. Sculptured angels' heads, palms and decorations adorn the columns, walls and ceiling. Light comes in through strange long narrow windows - obviously without panes - which are built diagonally to the walls. I suppose the idea is to keep the rain out.

Mary moves forward to a certain point. She then stops. A few metres from Her, there are more steps. At the top of these there is a kind of altar, beyond which there is another construction.

I now realise that what I thought was in the Temple, is instead the part surrounding the real Temple - that is the Holy - beyond which no one can proceed, apparently, except the priests. It is but an enclosed vestibule, which encircles the Temple - in which the Tabernacle is enclosed - on three of its sides. I do not know whether I have made myself understood. But I am neither an architect, nor an engineer.

Mary offers the Child, Who has woken up, and is turning His innocent eyes towards the priest, with the astonished look of infants a few days old. The priest takes Him in

his arms and raises Him - with arms fully stretched out - towards the Temple, standing against the (kind of) altar placed on top of the steps. The ceremony is over. The Child is handed back to His Mother, and the priest goes away.

There is a group of onlookers. Amongst them a little old man - bent with age, and limping - makes his way, leaning on a stick. (He must be very old - I would say over eighty.) He goes near Mary, and asks Her to give him the Child for a moment. Mary satisfies him, smiling.

I always thought that Simeon belonged to the sacerdotal class, but he is, instead, a simple believer, at least according to his garments. He takes the Child and kisses Him. Jesus smiles at Simeon, with the typical smile of sucklings. He seems to watch him, inquisitively, because the old man is crying and laughing at the same time. His tears form a sparkling embroidery, running along his wrinkles, and falling like beads on his long, white beard.

Jesus stretches out His little hands. He is Jesus, but still a child, and whatever moves in front of Him, draws His attention, so that He wants to get hold of it, to see what it is. Mary and Joseph smile, and so do all the others, who praise the beauty of the Child.

I hear the words of the holy old man, and I see the astonished gaze of Joseph, the deeply moved look of Mary, and the glances of the little crowd, partly surprised and moved, and partly laughing at the words of the old man. Amongst the latter there are some bearded and conceited-looking members of the Sanhedrin, who shake their heads, and give Simeon an ironic, pitying look. They must think he is a simpleton.

Mary's smile fades into paleness, when Simeon mentions sorrow. Although She knows, that word pierces Her soul. She goes closer to Joseph, to be comforted. She presses Her Child to Her breast, passionately. And like a thirsty soul, She takes in the words of Anna of Phanuel, who - being a woman - has mercy on Her suffering, and promises Her that the Eternal Father will soothe the hour of sorrow with a supernatural strength. Anna says: "Woman, He Who gave a Saviour to His people, will not lack the power to send His angel to console Your tears. The great women of Israel never lacked the help of the Lord, and You are far greater than Judith and Jael. Our God will give You a heart of the most pure gold, to withstand the storm of sorrow. In this way, You will be the greatest woman in Creation: the Mother. And You, Child, remember me, in the hour of Your mission."

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***(As the time is approaching towards His Passion, Jesus, speaking with His Mother, His apostles, and His women disciples, compares those who slaughtered the Holy Innocents, with those who would be accomplices in the biggest sin, the death of the Saviour. Mary of Alphaeus, known in the Gospel as Mary of Clopas, cries out:)***

‘No! It’s not possible! Mary...(?) always so serene... Mary...(?)’

‘Ask Her, if you do not believe what I say.’

‘I will ask Her! Is it true, Mary? You know?...’

And Mary, in a gentle but firm voice, says: ‘It is true. He was forty days old, and I was told by this holy man... But also previously... Oh! The Angel told Me, that while remaining the Virgin I would conceive a Son, Who would be called the Son of God, and is such because of His divine conception. When I was told that, and that in the barren womb of Elizabeth a fruit had been formed by a miracle of the Eternal Father, I had no difficulty in remembering the words of Isaiah: "The Virgin will give birth to a son and they will call Him the Immanuel"... Isaiah! He speaks of the Precursor... He speaks of the Man of sorrows, stained with blood, unrecognizable... a leper... for our sins... The sword has been in My heart since then, and everything has served to drive it in more deeply: the song of the angels, the words of Simeon, and the visit of the Kings from the East - everything...’

‘But which other everything, Mary? Jesus is in triumph, Jesus works miracles, Jesus is followed by larger and larger crowds... Is that not the truth?’ says Mary of Alphaeus.

And Mary, always in the same posture, replies to each question: ‘Yes...’ She says, without anguish, without joy, only with a quiet assent, because it is so...

‘Well then? Which other everything is piercing Your heart with a sword?’

‘Oh!... Everything...’

‘And You are so calm? So serene? Always the same as when You arrived here, a young bride, thirty-three years ago. I remember it so well that it seems yesterday to me... But how can You? I would go mad... I would do... I don’t know what I would do... No! It is not possible for a mother to know that, and to be calm!’

And Mary replies: ‘Before being a Mother, I am a daughter and servant of God... Where do I find My tranquillity? In doing the will of God. From where does My serenity come? From doing that will. If I had to do the will of a man, I might be upset, because a man, even the wisest, can always impose a wrong will. But the will of God! If He wanted Me to be the Mother of His Christ, have I perhaps to think that that is cruel, and in that thought, lose My serenity? Am I to be upset by the thought of what Redemption will be - to Him and to Me, also to Me, and how I will be able to overcome that hour? Oh! it will be dreadful...’ Mary gives an involuntary start, She shudders and clenches Her hands to prevent them from trembling - as if She wanted to pray more fervently - while Her face grows even paler, and Her delicate eyelids close on Her kind sky-blue eyes with an expression full of anguish. But She steadies Her voice after a deep sigh of anxiety, and She concludes: ‘But He - Who imposed His will on Me and Whom I serve with confident love - will grant Me His assistance

for that hour. He will grant it to Me, and to Him... Because the Father cannot impose a will that exceeds the strength of man... He succours... always... He will succour us, My Son... He will succour us... and there is no one but He, with His infinite means, who can succour us...'

And Jesus says: 'Yes, Mother. Love will succour us, in love we will succour each other. And in love we will redeem...'

Jesus has gone beside His Mother. He lays His hand on Her shoulder, and She raises Her face to look at Him: at Her handsome, healthy Jesus, destined to be disfigured by torture, killed with a thousand wounds. And She says: 'In love and in sorrow. Yes. And together...'

No one speaks any more Standing around the two chief Protagonists of the future tragedy of Golgotha, the apostles and women disciples look like pensive statues...

**(Mary says to Maria Valtorta:)** '...Among those present at the presentation at the Temple, no one had a thought for me. They looked at my Treasure, and praised Him for his superhuman beauty. But they did not praise his Mother, except in human terms. Only the saints knew me for what I was, and Elizabeth, Simeon, and Anna saw - in me - the Mother of the Savior, giving me the most sublime praise with their recognition...

The Holy Spirit acts in the hearts of the saints, and gives them lights of supernatural knowledge. The Holy Spirit illuminates the hearts of the saints, to make them see me. To see me in the light of God means to love me in truth. My Most Holy Son works on his own, to attract you to his love. I love you and wait, praying for you...'