



Reflection:

November 2021

“Every other person who ever came into this world came into it to live. Christ came into it to die. Death was a stumbling block to Socrates – it interrupted his teaching. But to Christ, death was the goal and fulfilment of His life, the gold that He was seeking” (Ven. Fulton J. Sheen, Life of Christ).

Why was Jesus restrained until His baptism of death was accomplished? (cf. Lk. 12:50) Why did He long to be the Lamb of God sacrificed at the altar of love? Was it from the deep desire He had, to see us delivered from the tyranny of self? “For we all like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Is. 53:6). This disobedience, this turning to one’s own way, which began with Satan in heaven and then spread to the Garden of Eden, had become the defining trait of humanity that has tried to find happiness apart from God. The disharmony and discontent this futile quest resulted in, moved the heart of God to embark on a rescue mission. Archbishop Sheen puts it succinctly when he says, “Our Lord spent three hours in redeeming, three years in teaching, and thirty years in obeying, in order that a rebellious, proud, and diabolically independent world might learn the value of obedience”.

Through the Sacrament of Baptism, which is a sharing in the death of Christ, graphically symbolized by going underwater, we ‘die’ to our sins and disobedient lifestyle and rise out of the water, to a new life of obedience. Paul reinforces this truth powerfully. “He died for all, that those who live, might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor. 5:15). He longed to die for us so that we will stop living for ourselves and start living for God, the only One who can give life in its fullness! Shall we pause and reflect? ‘No longer for myself but for Jesus’ – has this become the motto that guides our lives?

Interiorizing that Jesus took our place upon the Cross and that the power of His resurrection seeps into us through grace, marks a decisive moment in the life of a Christian. A heart that seeks happiness in pampering the self, is now drawn to something infinitely better. It grows to see everything as loss for the sake of Christ, and count them as refuse, so as to walk closely with the Beloved. He can now begin to love himself in a mature way, for the sake of Christ, and firmly deny that part of himself that seeks after the things of the world and flesh. He discerns with Paul that even though ‘all things are lawful for me, not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything’ (1 Cor. 6:12). Seeking to excel in everything he does for the glory of God, he experiences the joy of being a child of God, whose heart constantly echoes the prayer taught by His Master-‘Your Kingdom come, Your will be done’.

Now there may be times when we stumble and fall, and begin to think that this call is beyond us. Still, looking within us will not provide the solution, rather looking at Christ will. When we are forgiven much, we begin to love much! The woman who wasted more than a year’s wages by breaking the alabaster jar to anoint the feet of Jesus, and the effusive praise her sacrifice drew from the lips of Jesus, stirs each one of us to give ourselves completely to God and not to waste a drop on ourselves. What a privilege it is to live and labour so that Christ is magnified in our lives and through our ministry! As St. Ignatius teaches us in the Spiritual exercises, let us meditate on Jesus who died on the Cross for us. Let us ask Him why the Creator became a creation, and the eternal became temporal, so as to die for our sins. Looking at ourselves in the light of this love, let us ask ourselves what we have done for him, what we are doing for him, and what we ought to do for him. Stirred by this love, let us gird up our loins and join the bandwagon of saints and declare, “If we live, we live for the Lord!” Then our lives will be the aroma of Christ to a world lost in the darkness of self.

