

12. "Abide in my love"

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love." (Jn 15:9)

Adoration of Christ does not mean remaining in a closed house, in a reserved temple: it is a dwelling in his love, the love with which Jesus loves us as He is loved by the Father, that is, a love that, when it reaches us, is already radiant, radiating from the Father to the Son and from the Son to us. This is the nature of God's charity, its true nature, and the reality of every love. The joy of dwelling in Christ would be extinguished, would be snuffed out, if we presumed to dwell in Him without dwelling in his love.

There is always the tendency in us to possess the treasure only for ourselves, to possess it without clinging to it, without entering into it, into what it really is. This is a great temptation, because it is like presuming to possess God without receiving in Him the love that He is, the gift that He is to the world. A temptation to possess Jesus without transmitting him, without letting him live out in us his love, without limits, without exclusions, without end.

But these words of Jesus at the Last Supper, even if they expressly ask of us a love for others that extends to the point of giving our lives, begin and focus on a request and a fundamental offer, on which we will never finish concentrating: "Abide in my love" (Jn 15:9c).

In fact, before saying, "Abide in my love," Jesus tells us one of the most extraordinary things in the Gospel: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." Christ cannot tell us anything greater than this, because he tells us something infinite that comes to touch us, that comes to involve itself with us personally. What can be greater for us than the love of the Father for the Son in the gift of the Holy Spirit? Nothing can be greater because it is an infinite love, because it is the love that is all possible reality, all of reality and the whole source of every reality. Nothing uncreated and nothing created exists outside of this love. God does not exist outside of this love.

And Jesus tells us this like this, at table, as if he were saying something obvious. There cannot be a greater grace for us, a greater love, a more precious treasure for us, than to be loved by the Son of God as the Father loves him. A lifetime would not be enough to meditate and take account of what these words mean for us. And indeed we shall pass eternity in contemplating and receiving what they express.

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When Jesus adds, "Abide in my love," we have to understand what this means with the resonance in them of the words that precede them.

We understand first of all that this request to abide in his love, is less a demand upon us than it is his gift, an offer He makes us. As if he said: "See here, at your complete disposal, the infinite and yet absolutely personal space of my love for you, which is the same love with which the Father loves me. I could not give you a greater gift than this. It is a gift that coincides with my life, because I love from the love of the Father, I am His gift, and this gift is given you without reservations, to the point of dying on the Cross. You can enter into and abide in this love. Enter into it, live in it, abide in it forever! And if you leave it, if you lose this stay, if you fall outside of love, the door remains open, you can always come back. For it is in you, in your freedom and conscience, that you can fall outside of my love, but in reality in me it is not so, you never fall outside of my love, because even when you fall, and even more if you fall and go out, I love you as the Father loves me. Leaving my love is a

fiction, a diabolical lie that your freedom can make its own, but this is not reality. My love will never be withdrawn from you, will not go out, will not cease burning. And the more you enter into my love, the more you will go out from yourselves, that is, you will love as I love you. Just as I, who abide always in the Father's love, love you without limits, and I give you my whole life."

I could continue to infinity describing what the offer to abide in his love means for Jesus and for us. The whole Gospel and the letters of John, but also of St. Paul, express this proclamation without end, without possibility of exhaustion, as a mystery that no comprehension will ever manage to contain.

Indeed, the Gospel of John ends without exhausting itself:

"Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them, the one who also had leaned back against him during the supper and had said, 'Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?' When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, 'Lord, what about this man?' Jesus said to him, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? You follow me!' So the saying spread abroad among the brothers that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, 'If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?' This is the disciple who is bearing witness about these things, and who has written these things, and we know that his testimony is true. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written." (Jn 21:21-25)

John will remain until the return of Christ, not so much in remaining alive, in not dying, but in "abiding," in another "*menein*," the one connected to the coming of Christ, to the presence of Christ. Up to the end he will remain in the Church, also among us and in us, the disciple whom Jesus loves, that is, the *disciple who abides in his love*. This vocation, being this disciple, concerns each one of us, concerns every disciple of Christ, or rather: every human being, for every person is loved by Christ as the Father loves him, and hence every person is called to abide in his love.

We should think about this at least every day, at least at every Eucharist. We should think about it each time that we pray, each time that we meditate on Sacred Scripture, the Gospel.

The most important thing in life and in our vocation is precisely this remaining stunned and open before Jesus who tells us: "Abide in my love." Then, what this means we will never finish understanding, and every day, every instant, it will mean a thousand different things, for example it will at times mean stopping to pray, and at other times getting quickly to work in loving service to our neighbor, the poor. At times it will mean suffering in silent offering, for example in sickness, and other times it will mean celebrating and entertaining each other fraternally. There is an endless range of modalities in which we can abide in the love of Christ. Because in the end it is not a question of what one does or lives, but of where one's heart is. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:21).

(Chapters will resume on Monday, Sept. 11)