



From A Bishop's Journal (640)

Things That Don't Make Sense

Level Four of the family- and parish-based catechetics programme introduces us to intolerable situations that existed when Jesus was on earth. If he returned among us he would still be confronted with inhumane situations like terrorism and the exploitation of people throughout the world. However, the fact is that through these situations and through his disciples, Jesus continues to “suffer his agony” until the end of time.

Political Situations

The Holy Land, where “milk and honey” were supposed to flow, turned out to be a frequent theatre for wars and occupation by foreign powers. In Jesus' time, Palestine was under Roman occupation. All we need is listen to the Jesus' birth narrative as given by Saint Luke and which is proclaimed at Christmas Mass, to notice the Roman leaders Caesar Augustus and Quirinius, or the passion narratives where we are introduced to the same Romans, notably Pilate and Herod. The Jewish people had to pay taxes to Rome: the tax collectors were considered thieves, by the people. There were many soldiers around, whose duty was to repress all uprisings and attempts to rise up against the occupier. Groups were formed, like the Zealots, to bring about their country's independence. Several people believed that Jesus, who was descended from the royal line of David, was the one who would deliver Palestine from the Roman yoke. Even on the day of the Ascension, Jesus was asked when the new kingdom of Israel was to be established. The people had attempted several times to make Jesus their king. But Jesus, at the supreme moment of his life, declared that his kingdom was not of this world. What he aimed at first of all was setting up the kingdom of God, a kingdom of peace and justice, a kingdom of truth and holiness. He came that all may have life, and life to the full. Down through the centuries it will be of the utmost importance to remember this unique mission of Jesus.

Social Situations

In the days of Jesus, poverty was rampant throughout the land. The long procession of the destitute and poverty-ridden filed passed Jesus: the sick, the lame, the paralytics, those suffering from demon possession, the mute and the deaf. Saint Mark even mentions the woman who had been suffering haemorrhages for twelve years and who had suffered much at the hands of many doctors; she had spent all of her money but her situation had not improved but worsened, rather. Saint Luke writes

about Jesus' first discourse in the synagogue at Nazareth: he has come to proclaim the Good News to the poor, free the prisoners, heal the blind, bring freedom to the oppressed, and proclaim a year of grace. When we think about what a year of grace or holy year was meant for – freeing all the slaves, cancelling all debts, and leaving the land fallow for a year, to make it rest – it is not surprising that fighting broke out in the synagogue and that there was an attempt to throw Jesus over a cliff. It was a topsy-turvy world! However, Jesus remained faithful to this mission of liberation: he identified with the poor, the sick, the rejects of society, and the unfortunate and the wretched of all kinds. Leaving aside the prejudices of his day, he addressed society's "rejects", especially the women and the Samaritans, and he even let the lepers approach him.

Judicial Situations

If in certain milieus we are quite trigger happy and we do not think twice before liquidating a potential adversary, or that we pursue evil to the point of committing genocide, we can say that in Jesus' time individual and collective human rights were not respected either. Just consider the condemnation to death of all boys aged less than two years old, from whom Herod feared a possible rival, eventually. We can also think of Herod having John the Baptist decapitated, to please his wife Herodiad, and his family. We can also think of the stonings that were held based on the accusation of a few witnesses: the adulterous woman was saved because of Jesus telling the people, "Let him who has no sin cast the first stone." There was also the law of talion which had marked some progress in human civilisation: vengeance could not surpass the equivalent of the offense committed. However, Jesus declared: " 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth!' But I say to you: do not resist evil. If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer him the left." Among the other intolerable judicial situations there was the ignominious trial Jesus had to endure, the night of Holy Thursday and Good Friday.

Religious Situations

Saint Luke records that Jesus wept over Jerusalem, the holy city: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who slay the prophets and stone those who are sent to you! How often have I wanted to gather your children together as a mother bird collects her young under her wings, and you refused me! Your temple will be abandoned." We also recall the episode with the traders in the Temple when Jesus, roused to anger, overturned the tables of the traders: "My house is meant for a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves." In this surprising gesture of his, Jesus reveals his life's great passion, his "dream" for centuries to come: to make people aware of the Father and His plan of love. Jesus denounces all forms of hypocrisy, all injustice, and every violation of the law of God. He teaches without cease the great commandment of loving God with all one's heart, one's soul, and one's mind, and one's neighbour as oneself. He opposes those who forget the great Tradition to follow the traditions of men. He repeats that man is master of the sabbath, and that laws were made for man, and not the other way around.

A Major Directive

When Jesus called Matthew there was surprise in Jesus' entourage because he, Jesus, had seated himself at table with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus responded: "People who are in good health do

not need a doctor; sick people do. Go and learn the meaning of the words: 'It is mercy that I desire and not sacrifice.' I have come to call, not the self-righteous, but sinners." Through the mercy of Jesus, all these intolerable situations would be transformed. Happy Easter!

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