

## **Second Part**

St. Luke 9:51 invites us to see Jesus making a firm resolution to go to Jerusalem. The Greek text tells us that he set out for the city, even though he knew what awaited him. At every moment he manifested victorious strength in suffering, in his Passion, as a special call to courage and fortitude. His journey reached its climax when he took up his cross and went to Calvary. His saving mystery here is "carrying". The Good Shepherd carries us on his shoulders. We are his cross, his heaviest cross, the weight of all humanity. Suddenly there was unexpected help. Someone appeared, as if by surprise, to carry the cross behind Jesus. Forced or a free choice, it doesn't matter. He agreed to carry the cross.

We have, graphically, concretely, the symbol of the disciple, the one who takes up his cross and follows behind him. For the disciple, the call includes, as a consequence, carrying the cross. That is to say, to resemble and assimilate the Lord. To carry the cross is to assume the feelings and attitudes of Jesus. Reading Isaiah 53, Christians were able to recognize Jesus as the one who took upon himself human wickedness and who was crushed by the crimes of humanity. With Jesus we take on the pains and hopes of humanity.

In acknowledging and comfort to the women of Jerusalem, Jesus leads us to consider the pain of so many women who carry the crosses of violence, hunger, discrimination, human trafficking, domestic violence, prejudice, forced migration, mutilation and the loss of children. We are not called to look at ourselves and complain about our failures and sorrows.

"We are more alone than ever in an increasingly massified world that promotes individual interests and weakens the communitarian dimension of life. Indeed, there are markets where individuals become mere consumers or bystanders. As a rule, the advance of this kind of globalism strengthens the identity of the more powerful, who can protect themselves, but it tends to diminish the identity of the weaker and poorer regions, making them more vulnerable and dependent. In this way, political life becomes increasingly fragile in the face of transnational economic powers that operate with the principle of "divide and conquer". (Fratelli Tutti 12)

Like Jesus, we are called to have courage and to be strong. Our mission is to carry the crosses of others' sorrows, even if our own cross weighs us

down, the cross of life, of limitations, of defects and even of the sins we recognize in ourselves.

We do this without turning in upon ourselves. To the extent that we assume the pain of others, the salvific meaning of suffering is manifested. Being attentive to others frees us from ourselves. Our eyes must scan the multitude of people that surrounds us and detect the pains of those on whom our eyes rest. To carry humanity on one's shoulders is to stand with those who suffer any pain in order to fight for the life of all. To understand those who make mistakes, to make them discover life and to place their hope in Jesus. Union with Jesus gives us the strength to achieve this. How can we live this mission concretely? How did St. Paul of the Cross carry his cross and that of others?

### **The mystery of death**

Jesus was baptized. Jesus was plunged into the mystery of death. The Paschal celebration, which began at the Last Supper, is prolonged and concretized on the cross, and becomes present in every Eucharist and continues in the sorrows of the lives of those who suffer in every age. The same act of absolute love, of total self-giving, is perpetuated before us and sweeps us along like a enormous wave in order to live love in its entirety. The Lord's Passover envelops us, resurrects us, gives us the gift of the Spirit and impels us towards the definitive day of the Lord's glorious coming. We are presented with the price of our salvation, the slain Lamb, the living one. His cross is the most eloquent cathedra. In it we learn true love. To progress in the love of God we know of no more sublime book than Jesus Christ Crucified (St. Maximilian Kolbe). From his throne, his glorious cross, flow the four rivers that purify and irrigate the whole universe. Washed and purified in his redeeming blood, we are clothed with the new garment received in baptism. The white garment washed in the blood of the Lamb-- the red color of blood and the white color of death and resurrection. As in Genesis, God now covers our nakedness, our nothingness, with the incorruptible garment of grace. We contemplate his terrible death by crucifixion. The astonishing simplicity of the Gospel accounts reflects the greatness, the importance and the majesty of the event.

In Phil 2:5, St. Paul invites us to have the same feelings as Christ. Seeing him on the cross, we ask ourselves-- what did Jesus feel at that moment? First of all, the terrible physical pain throughout his body. However his heart was filled with compassion that led him to the maximum expression of love. He abandoned himself to the torturers and into the hands of the Father. He extraordinarily showed forgiveness, which he had preached and taught. He accepted the confession of the thief crucified with him. And perhaps the greatest suffering, the abandonment by the Father. To be on the cross, in place of all those who reject the loving presence of God.

He prayed with Psalm 22-- "*My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?*" He received no answer. It is as if the Father were saying to him— Wasn't this the reason that you became human? Do you not know that I am not on your side, but on the side of this humanity that rejects me? That is why I made you a sign of total separation, to separate yourself and to be separated from me. Through his loving surrender, all the lovelessness of all humanity is covered. Jesus' acceptance is complete. Our gaze is directed toward the cross. In the desert, those who looked at the serpent on the standard were healed (Num 21:7-9). The prophet (Zech 12:10) announces the gift of supplication and compassion when one looks and weeps as one would weep for an only child. John takes up the idea again in 8:28 and 3:14.

Now only the Mother and life remained for him. In this most solemn hour, the Mother is given to us. The Mother of Sorrows, the Mother of Easter, the Mother of Hope, the Mother of Life, the Mother of empty tombs, the Mother of rolled-away stones, of vanquished death. Mary the dawn, to awaken life. Mary of haste, of urgency, of victory over immobility. Mary of the search and of the encounter, but not of comfortable tranquility. Mary, not of the sterile desert, but of the inexhaustible fountains. Mary of beauty, harmony, flowers, tenderness and affection. Mary of God. Mary, MOTHER.

His life remains. He also surrenders it. John is the only one who says that at death, Jesus bowed his head and gave up the spirit. Or the Spirit. His head turned towards the earth, turned towards the Church gathered at the foot of the cross, turned towards us. The Holy Spirit poured out in the Passion brings about the transformation of the universe, embraced by the outstretched arms on the cross.

Thus the cosmos becomes the material of the eschatological Eucharist, when through its "Christening", God will be all in all things. Magnificent and mysterious manifestation of the Trinity: the Father who welcomes the sacrifice of the Son who gives the Spirit. Mystical eschatology already realized and not yet manifested. Once dead, was there anything left in Jesus? *"...One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and immediately blood and water came out"*. Blood and water flow from his open heart, the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist. By tearing open his heart, we understand that the Passion is to give oneself in love. The wound lets us see the interior of the heart, we search in the bowels of mercy *"through the wounds of the body the secrets of his heart are manifested, the great mystery of mercy is revealed, the bowels of mercy of our God who from on high visited us as a rising sun"* (St. Bernard).

Entering through the wound in the side of Jesus we find life in death, strength in fragility, hope in suffering. The Holy Year of 2025 invites us to make a pilgrimage in hope. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, Francis exhorts us: Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of hope, of the Gospel, of community, of joy, of missionary zeal, of the youthful face of the Church...

By remembering the Passion, the eschatological dimension of what we are meditating on opens before us. Through the Passion and the Cross, with the culminating moment of the Resurrection, the Kingdom of God opens for all, fully realized in Jesus and still under construction in the world. For this reason we are on pilgrimage with the Church and she, never settled in history, calls us to hope. Hope is not only in our present reality, but also in God's future. What Jesus did on the cross sustains our hope and assures us of what we still hope for. Jesus identified himself with all the crucified of all time. To live in hope is to struggle for life, full life for all who suffer.

The Passion becomes mission. We are sent to fulfill it. May St. Paul of the Cross accompany us and intercede for us.