

THE DIMENSION OF GIFT

*“Why are you troubled?
And why do questions arise in your hearts?
Look at my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.
Touch me and see,
because a ghost does not have flesh and bones
as you can see I have.”*

Dear Jesus, you come to us,
those redeemed by your Blood,
in the midst of our loneliness and fear,
drawing near and extending your hands,
the words “Peace be with you” on your lips.
But this presence, this presence!
We knew you to be crucified,
afflicted, and rejected,
without beauty, nor anything to draw our eyes.
How is it that now you come to us,
you who were buried in the tomb?

You come in beauty,
a beauty we glimpsed in your body,
in your words and actions and gestures
as you walked with us in the flesh.
But how is it that you come to us now,
the same as then, yet different?
For you bear in those extended hands
the marks of your Passion,
and in those feet the marks of the nails...
and through this wounded openness
the divine light shines with glory.
You are the same One who suffered,
who entered into our pain and death,
and yet now you have broken it asunder
and come to us in the fullness of life...
a life that is both wholly human,
and yet also radiantly divine.

It is as if in you, through your gift of self,
a new dimension of reality has been opened.
And we struggle to understand this newness,
just as a two-dimensional figure,
encountering a sphere passing through
its flat and formless world,
struggles to grasp and understand.
But you offer your flesh to us,
this flesh that bears the same dimensions as our own,
and yet is also utterly open to the deeper mystery,
the dimension of participation in divine life.

Yes, through your Paschal Mystery, Jesus,
you have become totally open;

the Open One, we could call you...
for in that cruciformity of the Passion,
your arms extended, your Heart pierced open,
you reached out to embrace heaven and earth,
and made your Heart, your being,
a haven for every heart within creation.
Yes, you descended to the lowest
without leaving behind the highest
(the loving bosom of the Father!),
but rather carrying light into the darkness
so as to take us up and carry us,
in yourself, from darkness into light.

And now the darkness is passing away
and the true light is already shining,
though this newness takes up our flesh, our humanity,
transfigured in the newness of God.
In the very flesh that we touch,
in the Body and Blood that we consume,
we encounter the divinity that is yours
in the communion of the Trinity’s life,
with the Father and the Spirit of your love.

We are taken up into your own cruciformity,
the radical openness of heart and life...
to letting ourselves be loved, and loving,
to abiding in the vulnerability of relationship.
And in this new dimension of love,
this dimension of the Father’s all-enfolding Gift,
we realize that the cruciform gesture,
this mystery of your Cross implanted in our life,
is enveloped in a greater Mystery
in which alone, alone all finds its place:
the Circle of Divine Love
in which all things are sheltered
and gently, gently held.

+ + +

WITHOUT YOU – JOHN 21:1-14

Without you, Jesus, we toil all night,
laboring and working, and bring in nothing,
our nets empty and we ourselves, exhausted.
But at a simple word from you
we lower the nets, and the catch,
the catch is too much to pull in.

What is the meaning of this reality,
this lesson that, in silence, you teach?
The beloved disciple understands,
for he says, the moment of the catch:
It is the Lord.

And Peter, too, then understands,
for he leaps into the sea to come to you.

How true is it for us, dear Jesus,
that in our contemporary world,
in this culture in which we live,
we are working day by day
within the night.

We work with earnestness,
toiling away at so many things,
but our very efforts have become so hollow,
for in this we seek not the kingdom of God,
but so often the kingdom of man, of this world...
human respect, esteem, material prosperity,
a sense of identity gained through human activity,
or even a flight into “movement”
that distracts us from the greater emptiness
that lies within us, or which creeps upon our vision
in those rare moments of silence and solitude.

A culture without roots...
for we have forgotten our past,
and therefore also our future.
The present moment has become
something isolated and estranged,
formless and without substance.
But roots means more than just any past,
and the future is more than just any future...
for this very loss of roots comes
from the collapse of our narrow ideas.
And this collapse can signal anew
an invitation to grace and transformation.

For what, indeed, is “the pursuit of happiness”
when it does not spring from the Gospel soil,
when it is not enveloped from beginning to end
in the all-enveloping Circle of Eternal Love
and the pure grace of Redemption?
This grace has bathed the whole world in light
and has made Beatitude present in the flesh.
Now the poor, the mourning, the meek and humble
bear in their heart and bodies the gift of eternal life.
Possessing nothing, they have all things,
and having nothing, they make many rich.

But we have forgotten all of this,
and now we bear our lives, not as a gift,

a gift flowing unceasingly from your loving hand
and from that Crucified and Risen Heart
which has opened itself, holding us deep within.
This darkness of forgetfulness
makes us feel the need to create from within
what comes only as a gift from without,
and to find security or purpose, even identity,
in a place where it is not to be found.

All of our existence came in the beginning,
and is meant to come at every moment
—ah, and indeed it does!—
as a gift from you, and within your Love.
But how many do not see, do not live this!
There must first be a recognition of our powerlessness,
the throwing up of our hands in neediness...
indeed, admitting that the depression and anxiety,
the deep sadness enveloping us
in the midst of all our activity, our striving,
and our pursuit of pleasure and excitement—
admitting that this is a symptom of our poverty
in the midst of a land of great wealth,
a sign of hearts that are suffocating with “things”
and have forgotten that the true joy
consists not in holding, but in being held.

But you come to us, Jesus,
you come to us unwearied
in the power and glory of your Resurrection!
Open again the hearts of your children
to recognize the gift of your love,
that they may throw themselves open to receive,
to receive the gift of life anew from you...
and within this gift of belovedness,
to receive everything else besides.

Enkindle in us our thirst for you,
which burns still in our restlessness,
by revealing to us anew your thirst for us,
that tender, constant and passionate love
which seeks us out only to hold and to embrace,
and in this embrace fills all of life with meaning.
For in this embrace every moment, every instant of life,
intersects with the eternity of God,
for in it, through your opened Heart, dear Jesus,
we can feel the heartbeat of God unceasingly surging,
right here, close to our own, holding us.