

RECAP

In these final lectures, we have covered a bit of terrain.

Final Lecture 1: Why should we believe in Jesus? Why should anyone?

In the first lecture, we treated: (1) Why we should believe in Jesus, and we have discussed how only Love can be an adequate response—more precisely, God’s love poured out “to the end” (Jn 13:1) for us. This Love simultaneously reveals: (i) God’s love for the world, which includes all of us as a whole and each of us as individuals; (ii) the glory of God insofar as the Cross is God’s self-glorification, i.e. his self-revelation, as Love. The “love to the end” given on the Cross is God’s final word about himself; and (iii) this Love reveals to me, by contrast, that I have not loved, and thus my need for forgiveness and conversion in order to respond in love.

Final Lecture 2: The Heart of the Mystery of Redemption

In the second lecture (2), we dove right into the “heart of the mystery of redemption,” and meditated upon the “sacrum commercium,” or the “admirabile commercium.” In this lecture, we sought to answer the question of what it means that Christ died for me. We reflected on the mystery of vicarious atonement. Through this mystery, Christ truly bore *my* sins and *my* sufferings, along with those of everyone else, and truly died *my* death and rose again to newness of life. This means that we have been retransplanted, ontologically speaking, into the open wound in Christ’s side. If we could visibly see spiritual realities, we would see that the very Being that sustains our being is the wound on the side of Christ, pierced and transfigured, out of love for us. This risen Christ, who has conquered the “sin of the world,” and thus *my* sin, too, is “deeper than my deepest and higher than my highest” (Augustine). I need to lose myself so that I can find myself in him; plant myself in *his* soil, the soil of his pierced side which truly grounds my being.

[Love Alone is Credible; To the Heart of the Mystery of Redemption; Elucidations; The Moment of Christian Witness; Deus Caritas Est; Augustine, selections]

Love as the Christian “Form”

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1 Jn 4:16). In the same verse, Saint John offers a summary of the Christian life: “We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us.” Love desires no recompense other than to be loved in return; and thus God desires nothing in return for his love than our love. “Let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth” (1 Jn 3:18).

Indeed, we must love absolute love and direct our love to the Lover, setting aside all other relative and competing objects of love. To the extent that we do not remain absolutely faithful to absolute love, these objects turn into idols. The bridegroom and the bride in the Song of Songs have no children; they are everything and sufficient for one another, and all their fruitfulness lies enclosed within the circle of their mutual love: *hortus conclusus*, *fons signatus*.

1. The entire Christian life is a response to God’s love.

1.1. “Where love grows cold, law increases.”

1.2. **Worship & thanksgiving.** In the same way, every Christian ‘apostolate’ strays from love and becomes a ratiocinated siphoning of love (cf. Judas’ pseudo-charitable objection to Mary’s utterly ‘wasteful’ *squandering* in Jn 12:3-8) to the extent that absolute love does not receive a response that is likewise absolute and not directed to any ulterior end. We call this response ‘worship’ (Jn 4:24; 9:38; Rev 14:7), the pure ‘thanks-giving’ that gives glory (Mt 15:36 and parallels, Rom 1:8, etc.; 1 Thess 5:18; Rev 4:9); it is a response that must be fashioned into a form that gathers up and confers meaning upon one’s entire existence (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17). Unconditional priority must be accorded to the placing of oneself entirely at the disposal of divine love. Since it serves no ulterior purpose, this attitude of readiness cannot but appear useless in the eyes of the world, which is caught up in so many urgent and reasonable occupations (Lk 10:42).

1.3. **Prayer:** Prayer, both ecclesial and personal prayer, ranks higher than all action since as the act of worship and glorification that befits love, the act in which one makes the most fundamental attempt to answer with selflessness and thereby shows that one has understood the divine proclamation. It is as tragic as it is ridiculous to see Christians today giving up this fundamental priority—which is witnessed to by the entire Old and New Testaments and by Jesus’ life—and seeking instead an immediate encounter with Christ in their neighbor, or even in purely worldly work and technological activity. Engaged in such work, they soon lose the capacity to see any distinction between worldly responsibility and Christian mission. Whoever does not come to know the face of God in contemplation will not recognize it in action, even when it reveals itself to him in the face of the oppressed and humiliated.

1.4. **Eucharist:** Moreover, the celebration of the Eucharist is itself an *anamnesis*, which means that it is contemplation in love and the communion of love with love; and it is only from such a celebration that a Christian mission goes out into the world: *Ite missa*

*est!*¹ [We will return to the Eucharist again later]. It means that for the Christian who have fully surrendered himself to the will of God, out of love, since God has first surrendered himself to me, such a one can say: let the ‘glory of God be praised in all things’ (St Paul, Eph 1:6), so that ‘God be glorified in all things’ (St Benedict); Let ‘everything happen for the greater glory of God’ (St Ignatius of Loyola). This glorification occurs in the human act insofar as it is inspired by love and is ordered to love.

- 1.5. **Christian Action:** Only by presupposing God’s prior and inconceivable forgiveness can the limitations of human good will be transcended, and only thus can the danger of human pride be avoided: through God’s love, I am first of all one who has been humbled, for my ‘entire debt’ had first to be forgiven, and my own secondary act of forgiveness is merely an echo; indeed, it is nothing but an act of simple obedience and not at all something proceeding from my own sovereign will. Limitations thus fall away: because God forgave me while I was still his enemy (rom 5:10), I must also forgive my fellow men while they are enemies (Mt 5:43-48); because God has given to me without counting the costs, to the point of wholly losing himself (Mt 27:46), I must surrender any worldly calculation of the relationship between almsgiving and compensation (Mt 6:1-4; 6:19-34); the standard that God lays down becomes the standard that I must lay down, and thus the standard by which I myself am measured. This is not a principle of ‘mere justice,’ but the logic of absolute love. Once again, it is unconditionality of this love, which is done to us and which we must therefore allow to be done to others, that contains ‘fear’ within itself.
- 1.6. **Love of Neighbor:** If Christ has borne this least one and taken away his guilt, as he looks in the eyes of my Father in heaven; this image alone is true, and the one that I have, which seems so clear to me, is false. The Christian encounter Christ *in* his neighbor, not beyond him or above him; and only in this way does the encounter correspond to the incarnate and suffering love of the one who calls himself ‘Son of God’ without the article (Jn 5:27), and who is the nearest to us in all those who are near. — Christian action is therefore a being taken up into God’s action through grace, being taken up into God’s love so that one can love with him. It is only here that Christian *knowledge about God* becomes possible, for ‘he who does not love, does not know God; for God is love’ (1 Jn 4:8). Love, in this context, means unconditional commitment, which implicitly (that is, when necessary) includes a willingness to go all the way to one’s death: ‘Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends’ (Jn 15:13). ‘By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren’ (1 Jn 3:16). This is the fundamental law for all Christian ethics, and even for all Christian knowledge: to carry out one’s action in conjunction with what has already been done in its fullness, and therefore to bring about and perfect that which has already been brought about and perfected, since it is only in this way that what is revealed in itself becomes revealed also to us: ‘Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought

¹ Benedict XVI, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (2007): “In antiquity, *missa* simply meant ‘dismissal.’ In Christian usage, however, it gradually took on a deeper meaning. The word ‘dismissa’ has come to imply a ‘mission.’ These few words succinctly express the missionary nature of the Church” (§51).

also to love one another, then God abides in us and his love is perfected in us' (1 Jn 4:11-12).

2. If the entire Christian life is a response to God's love, then what is the "form" of a Christian? What is the "shape" of a Christian? What is "Christian" about a Christian person?

- 2.1. But if love can be measured by nothing other than itself, then love appears as formless, transcending all creaturely determinateness and precisely for this reason a threat to it. In other words, how can we say that *Love* is the determining characteristic of a Christian?
 - 2.1.1. We can't say "works," because these are (at best) mere echoes of love
 - 2.1.2. We can't say "faith" (insofar as faith, when schizophrenically severed from love, becomes a mere positing of the truth of something)
 - 2.1.3. We can't say suffering, which can also occur against one's will
 - 2.1.4. We can't say sacrifice, which can be self-righteousness
 - 2.1.5. Finally, we can't say subjective experience of God, which can be in part something also granted to one who does not love.
 - 2.1.6. Only love can be the measure of a Christian. So, what do we do?
- 2.2. One must first of all endure this apparent formlessness, for love is unconditional assent to and readiness for God's will, whether this will has expressed itself yet or not; love is an apriori Yes to whatever may come, whether it be the Cross, or being plunged into absolute abandonment, or being forgotten, or utter uselessness and meaninglessness. It is the Son's Yes to the Father, the Mother's Yes to the angel, because he carries God's Word, the Church's Yes, given in and with all her members, to her Lord's sovereign will: 'If it is my will ..., what is that to you?' (Jn 21:22, 23). This love is 'the mind of the Church,' which the Church possesses subjectively in relation to Christ, and therefore objectively as a norm for the mind of her members. **It is precisely this total and complete self-surrender in love and obedience that is the form of a Christian.**

Part 1: The Archetype of Christ

Part 2: Implications of Christ's Archetype for Christian Life / Form

Part 3: Mary as the Archetype of Ecclesial and Crucified Faith

I. PART 1: THE ARCHETYPE OF CHRIST

3. The Archetype of Christ – self-surrendering love in obedience

Philippians 2: 5-11

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
6 who, though he was in the **form** of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
7 but emptied himself (**kenosis**), taking the **form** of a slave, being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form,
8 he humbled himself

and became **obedient** to the point of death—even **death on a cross**.
9 **Therefore** God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name,
10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
11 and every tongue should confess that **Jesus Christ is Lord**, to the **glory of God the Father**.

- 3.1. ***But, as the ‘seed of God’ (1 Jn 3:9), God’s love implants itself into this threefold absolute openness of love as fiat, giving it determination and form;*** it is the Father’s ‘will,’ ‘pleasure,’ ‘plan,’ ‘intention,’ ‘decision,’ ‘predetermination’ (Eph 1:1-11), in which the Son’s mission takes form. This form, then, informs the Church’s mission, which, in turn, informs the Christian’s mission and ultimately, in the service of God’s comprehensive plan, informs the entire structure of creation with its countless individual structures in space and time. ... The Father’s mission gives form, not only to his office and destiny as redeemer, down to its most insignificant details, but also gives form to the essential traits of his individual nature. He takes on a human existence in order to sacrifice it to God for all men and for the world as a whole, in order to unite God and the world in this liquidation / squandering of himself, in order to receive the sacrificed nature (and thus the world) transformed and eternalized in the Resurrection, and in order to lay this same nature (and thus the world) eternally into the Father’s hands.
- 3.2. ***This is the form, and it is into this form that Christ was baptized:*** one’s baptism ‘into Jesus’ death’ is being ‘buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life’ (Rom 6:3-4). This new life can be nothing other than Christ’s eternal life, to which there is no other access other than through the perfect *fiat*. This *fiat* is thus given into an objective, sacramental way in baptism; it is pronounced in a representative way on behalf of every baptized child and must then be fundamentally ratified by this child in a lifelong, stuttering attempt to approximate it existentially. ... This stuttering is love’s attempt, step by step, to realize the truth of this fundamental surrender of oneself to God. Freedom from the compulsion of sin is freedom to serve God (Rom 6:12-14), a service wherein man stands in the nakedness of death awaiting his new form God as a baptismal

gown: ‘For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ’ (Gal 3:27), ‘and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness’ (Eph 4:24), and therefore put on the form of Christ’s life, ‘put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony’ (Col 3:12-14).

- 3.3. ***The Christian does not choose this path ‘in order to perfect himself’ or even ‘to find happiness,’ but because he loves love, the love that was manifest to him in Christ.*** And it is only within this love that he can come to believe that his self-sacrifice, his casting himself into the sacrifice of the Cross, can have a ‘meaning’ for humanity and for God. Scripture’s commandment to turn the other cheek does not contain a primarily ethical meaning, but the meaning of love, which ‘demands that one suffer humiliation with the humiliated Christ rather than receive honor, to be seen as a fool and madman for Christ’s sake, who himself was seen primarily as such, rather than to be esteemed as wise and clever in this world” (St Ignatius of Loyola).
- 3.4. ***He ‘possesses’ love only insofar as love possesses him, which means that he never possesses love in such a way that he could describe it as one of his powers, which lies at his own disposal.*** To be sure, this does not mean that love remains external to him, but if it does not, it is only because *love* itself takes possession of *him* in his innermost heart—*interius intimo deo*. Love ‘organizes’ him, not the other way around; it makes man, who puts up constant resistance, into its own instrument. If he ever becomes acquainted with love, he will be careful not to say that he has it. He will at most dare to repeat John’s word, as the Church as Bride herself does: ‘We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren’ (1 Jn 3:14).
- 3.5. ***Christians who are sent into the world are put on a path with authority and with the powers to convince, but these powers do not refer to the ones sent; they refer only to the Lord who is proclaimed.*** The same can be said in relation to faith, hope, and love, insofar as they are meant to draw people’s attention to God’s form in the world. ‘We do not come to proclaim ourselves, but Jesus Christ, as Master, while we ourselves [in our eyes] are your servants for Jesus’ sake.” Therefore this principle cannot become a fixed and easily graspable form that converges with the performance of worldly work. Instead, as a ‘fragrance of Christ’ that blows here and there and back again, beyond all grasp, it must announce something of the infinite of love, ‘to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life’ (2 Cor 2:16). Only a fragrance, but one that compels a decision and lays bare the decision hidden in the depths.
- 3.6. ***The form of Christian love, as it appears in the sign of Christ, is absolutely indivisible.*** Accordingly, there are not three vows and different states as such, but only one consecration of oneself into the crucified form of love as a single, all-encompassing life-form. All Christians are inscribed into this form of life through baptism (Rom 6:3f), but in the particular form that is ‘counseled,’ the form of Christ—as ‘*forma servi*’ [form of a slave] (Phil 2:7; cf. Mt 20:27-28)—becomes the fruitful and formative ‘*forma gregis*’ [an example to the flock] (1 Pet 5:3) and ‘*forma omnibus credentibus*’ [an

example to all believers] (1 Thess 1:7); it become as form that represents the form of Christ for the Church and the for the world, and thus, as love that serves and ministers, it becomes the yeast that disappears into both. For the formative power of Christ lies in the formlessness of the grain of wheat that dies and wastes away in the humus, the grain that rises again, not in its own form but in that of the stalk of wheat (Jn 12:24; 1 Cor 15:36, 42-44).

- 3.7. This movement into the earth (*humilis*) is universally Christian; with varying emphases, this movement belongs equally to the married and to the unmarried, to active and to contemplative Christians. *The Christian grain of wheat possesses a genuine formative fruitfulness only if it does not encapsulate itself within a particular form set alongside all the forms of the world, an illusory form that thus condemns itself to sterility, but in imitation of the Founder's archetype squanders itself and offers itself up as a particular form—without being afraid of the dream of being abandoned and of letting go of oneself.* Indeed, for the world, love alone is credible.

II. IMPLICATIONS OF CHRIST'S ARCHETYPE FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE/ FORM

4. Why so serious? Isn't thank you enough? Or, how about, a self-decreed synthesis? We all need balance ... Right, Lord?

- 4.1. *Self-Decreed Synthesis:* A man may demand, as a *conditio sine qua non*, that he, his family, his friends, his career, his concern for the people, the state, civilization, the world, the present and the future be placed on an equal footing with Christ. He does so under the pretext that these are all-good, God-created things and that the order of redemption cannot possibly contradict the order of creation, since God himself strives for a synthesis of the two; in his eyes, man therefore probably has the right, perhaps even the duty, to do the same, for the very reason that the order of redemption distinctly tells us to care for all these things, particularly our fellow men. Such a man will lose his life in whatever way this expression is meant to be understood, whether as a life surrounded by all these valuable earthly goods and to the exclusion of Christ, or—what really amounts to the same thing—as a life surrounded by these goods but with the additional attempt to establish a self-decreed synthesis between these and the commands of Christ. In the first case a man will lose his life at the very latest when physical death overtakes him. In the second case, however, the loss of life will be more painful and profound, because the self-decreed synthesis is dead, in the sense of being bad and unfruitful, and neither a proper worldly life nor a proper Christian life can be led according to its principles. 'For whoever loses his life for my sake will find it' (Cf. Mt 16:25; Mt 8:34-35; Lk 17:33). The words 'for my sake' represent the divine line, the 'sword' (Mt

10:34) that produces, out of itself as it were, the unexpected reconciliation and synthesis. The man who stakes his all on this one thing wins all, but he must of course reckon with the loss of everything else excluded by this one thing.

- 4.2. **Response: his whole life demands a response of our whole life:** This does not mean that every single Christian must suffer bloody martyrdom, but he must consider the entire case as the external representation of the inner reality out of which he lives. Paul puts it this way (at first without any explanation): ‘For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all.’ The explanation and the grounds for this statement do not appear until the following verse: ‘And 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 5:14-15). Christ’s dying for us is presented as an *a priori* of the Christian attitude, which is thereby stamped as perfect. In the Epistle to the Romans Paul shows that this objective *a priori* element in Christ’s action has its effect on Christian baptism, which, independently of any subjective belief, objectively postulates a state of being dead and buried with Christ. He then, of course, goes on to say that the existential attitude of the Christian should be shaped and determined by this *a priori* element (Rom 6:3-11). — We are able to grasp here, in the childlike freshness of its *living* source, what faith, and a life lived through faith, has to tell us. It tells us that we should be thankful with the whole of our being that we owe our whole being to the historical figure of Christ. And since the only reason that I owe my whole being to him is because he sacrificed his being for mine, the only way to express my thanks is with my whole being.
- 4.3. **Why so serious?** is it not equally conceivable that we could gratefully accept a favor from God (a favor, however, for which God had to pledge the life of his eternal Son) that we did not actually ask for, without having to become so seriously committed on our side? Surely God could be satisfied with a feeling of sincere gratitude on the part of the redeemed who acknowledge their pleasure in the gift received and are even prepared to be constantly and joyful mindful of the benefit bestowed on them
- 4.4. **God’s Yardstick is the only measure for our response:** But God does not content himself with our heartfelt thanks. He wants to be able to recognize his own Son in Christian men and women. However far they may fall short of the ideal of Christ in their way of thinking, they must in principle have given their assent to the love by which they have been redeemed. And if one looks deeper into the matter Christians are not even in a position to decide in what existential coin they are prepared to repay God. For if ‘one has died for all and therefore all have died’ (2 Cor 5:14), God has from the outset made a decree concerning the death of all, on the assumption that the greatest revelation of divine love and truth manifested in the death of Christ was perhaps worthy of being considered by man himself as the best prospect earthly life afforded him as the greatest revelation he himself could make to God—and consequently as what must be chosen in unconditional freedom. The believer must be this or nothing at all. He cannot be one who measures with two different yardsticks, one for God/Christ and one for himself.

The truth that provides the yardstick for faith is God’s willingness to die for the world he loves, for mankind, and for me as an individual. This love became manifest in the dark

night of Christ's crucifixion. Every source of grace—faith, love, and hope—springs from this night. Everything that I am (insofar as I am anything more on this earth than a fugitive figure without hope, all of whose illusions are rendered worthless by death), I am solely by virtue of Christ's death, which opens up to me the possibility of fulfillment in God. I blossom on the grave of God who died for me. I sink my roots deep into the nourishing soil of his flesh and blood. The love that I draw in faith from this soil can be of no other kind than the love of one who is buried.

Christian belief means the unconditional resolve to surrender one's life for Christ's sake. The death of Christ is for us the opening up of the glory of divine love, and to understand our position as believers in the light of this death means to interpret our position as arising not from a marginal or borderline situation but from the absolute center of reality.

5. Therefore, what does it mean to have an existence in faith? What does it mean to live as a Christian?

- 5.1. An existence in faith would be one in the death of love—not an arbitrary sacrifice or surrender varying in degree according to our estimation of it at any given moment, nor one that we manipulate to suit ourselves, but a willingness in advance to surrender ourselves wholly at every single moment in our Christian existence when the need arises. 'By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren' (1 Jn 3:16). In this axiom of the beloved disciple, 'love' means the absolute love as it appeared in the mystery made manifest by Christ.
- 5.2. If I, fully believing, comprehend Christ's death as a death died for me, I acquire thereby (and not otherwise!) the right to view my own life as a response to this. On the reverse side, this right carries with it the duty of taking the question of death seriously, as something by means of which I interpret my own situation as a Christian.
- 5.3. "To rejoice when we suffer means to place, when we are suffering, our subjective suffering into the objective good news of the Lord, just as the Son hanging on the Cross suffers in a certain joy as a deposit made at being able to glorify the Father through his suffering. In returning to the Father, the Son will live there the perfect joy of the glorification of the Father, just as he can in his own joy glorify the Father, the joy that he will offer us *at the revelation of his glory*" (Adrienne von Speyr, *Lettres catholiques* on 1 Peter 4:13, in *Katholische Briefe* I:380-82).

6. The Mystery of Glory

- 6.1. The Cross is the self-glorification of the love of God in the world. This can be understood only if one takes into consideration and fully believes in the hidden meaning,

which his that in taking upon itself all the sins of the world—in being plunged into the darkest of nights—eternal love surrenders itself to the uttermost limits of God-forsakenness in order to prove itself, at the moment of its greatest weakness, stronger than all the guilt and sin of the world. The complete surrender of free will in the experience of suffering (the nailing of the body to the cross corresponds to the ever more terrifying bondage of the spirit) remains an expression of the highest kind of free will: ‘For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again’ (Jn 10:17-18).

- 6.2. The power to regain life completely is contained in the capacity for its total self-surrender. There can be absolutely no doubt as to the resurrection of the Son: death and resurrection are the two naturally reverse aspects of one and the same act of love. The glory that manifests itself on Easter is already present in the veiled glory of Good Friday. For the glory is decisively the self-glorifying love of God manifested to all the world. In the final instance, love is its own reward, which does not mean to say that the promise of the greatest imaginable joy could ever exclude the deepest suffering: darkness and light are correlatives in Jesus Christ’s epiphany of love. But they are correlatives in the sense that the love issuing from the spear-wound in the side of the resurrected Christ streams forth into the Church and the world: the seal on Gods’ love is broken open. With the opening-up of the heart, the Holy Spirit is freed on the one hand as the Spirit of the Father, who let his Son suffer because he so loved the world, and on the other hand as the Spirit of the Son, who resigned it to the Father before his death in order to suffer the total death of spiritual abandonment. The wounds are transfigured, the Spirit is Pentecostal and the Church is bathed in the light of Easter, which the Word has earned for it. But all the transfiguration and transparency of Christian existence stream from the darkness of death; even the crucifixion Christ ceases to be bound by the limits of finite time, just as little as he is bound by it during his descent into hell. Consequently, his action is not to be considered as belonging to the past. His action can be considered as belonging to the past only insofar as it is an irreversible act of redemption that takes place between the time of his crucifixion and his Resurrection. The Church is founded in and upon this act.

III. MARY AS THE ARCHETYPE OF ECCLESIAL AND CRUCIFIED FAITH

This fruitfulness that God expects of us and of his whole Church is founded on the divinity of the Bridegroom who communicates his own fruitfulness to the human Bride. In order for Mary to be capable of acceding to the Cross, an ever more profound, merciless initiation is necessary for her, applied without regard for her by her Son. She is submitted to all the humiliations, to feel them, to accept them like the sword that is to pierce her heart. Consequently, all the Gospel scenes where the Son encounters his Mother will be scenes of humiliation:

—at the Temple, Mary does not understand why the Son has done that to her;

—at Cana, she is dismissed: ‘Woman, what have you to do with me?’ (Jn 2:4)

—at the time of her visit, she is not even received, and the Son designates his listeners as his brothers and his mother;

—when the woman in the crowd blesses ‘the breasts that you sucked,’ Jesus again turns the attention away from his Mother: ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it’ (Lk 11:27-28).

After all these rejections and all the anxieties and incomprehension of Mary, she will be ready to hear, she will be ready to hear, beneath the Cross, the last word of the Son, the hardest perhaps, for he withdraws from her his sonship in order to substitute another for it: ‘Woman, behold your son’ (Jn 19:26). And it is precisely in this way that the perfect union between the two is accomplished: just as the Father abandons his Son, the Son separates himself from his Mother. This form of union was necessary so that Mary—who henceforth would have to form the center of the Church—might know from experience the mystery of redemption and might be able to transmit it to her new children.

Just as Christ is humiliated all the way to the Cross in order to be able to fulfill the mission of the Father, so he humiliates his Mother and bestows on her her ecclesial mission through a final humiliation. He will proceed in the same way with Peter, who, at the moment when his treason is recalled, will be invested with his responsibility as shepherd.

With all that it is not our intention to encourage a certain dolorism, more morbid than Christian, that would seek to sink into the sufferings of the Crucified. If Christ, in Luke, commands us to carry our cross every day, he implies very precisely that this dull, ordinary cross consists in persevering at every moment in the Marian Yes, which transforms everyday mishaps as much as possible into situations that are fruitful in Christian terms.

It is always Christ who gives a share in his Cross, but the form of this participation always remains ecclesial and, thus, Marian, in priests and religious no less than in the ordinary faithful. But if Saint Paul affirms that he finds his joy ‘in my sufferings for your sake’ and that ‘in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church’ (Col 1:24), he is very conscious of enduring these sufferings in favor of the Church as a grace that the crucified Lord grants him. ‘Was Paul crucified for you?’ (1 Cor 1:13).

Christ takes up the elements lacking to the Cross of Christ and that are provided him by the compassionate Church, in his original Cross in order to make a whole indivisible offering of them to God the Father as a unique act of love that exceeds the weight of sin. But everything the ecclesial body adds is derived from the Cross; it is through grace from the Head that the Body can collaborate; it is an effect of the fullness of Christ that a place is reserved for us in the redemptive work. The Marian and ecclesial yes is always response, consent, never the first action.

