

Genoa, 16th December 2001

Embracing Jesus Forsaken

How can we learn to love Jesus forsaken immediately and with joy when suffering comes to us? Chiara Lubich spoke about this during a meeting with the Focolare community in the North of Italy.

... Sometimes I'm able to love Jesus forsaken immediately and with joy. I see him, I love him and I'm able to go beyond the cross. But there are other times when I see him but I stay in front of the cross without going beyond it. I know it's him, but I don't really love Jesus forsaken because I stay in the suffering. Chiara, can you help me to overcome these moments?

Chiara: Look, first of all, I would like to say something which perhaps not everyone knows. I would like to explain this whole thing clearly, the fact that we see Jesus forsaken in suffering. You might say: "But listen, Chiara, it's a suffering, it's not Jesus forsaken!"

I always think of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus. One day before she died, quite a while before, she coughed up blood because she had tuberculosis. Well, she didn't say: "I've coughed up blood"; she said: "Here is my Spouse". She was a virgin and she had married Jesus crucified. So she said: here is my Spouse. Was St. Theresa imagining things? Was she being sentimental? Or was she speaking the truth?

We can look at everything from a purely human viewpoint and from a supernatural viewpoint. When Jesus came on earth, he took our human nature and became man. Yes, he certainly made himself one; he made himself one and he became man. Besides taking on our humanity, he also took on, as the Church Fathers say, all our shortcomings, faults, failures and sins, in order to redeem them. He took on all these things.

St Paul says that he made himself sin, because he had sin on top of him, not within him – he wasn't a sinner – he made himself sin. He made himself excommunication, not excommunicated. In taking on our human nature, he took upon himself all our limits

So this is why when something negative happens to us, for example, you might fail an exam and humanly speaking, yes, you've failed the exam, just as St. Theresa could say, humanly speaking: humanly speaking, this is blood. But supernaturally speaking, being failed is already in Jesus who took it upon himself; it's in him because he took it on himself when he came on earth. So behind being failed, you see him, you see his face, as we say. It's true, just as it was for St. Theresa: here is my Spouse. You too can say: here is my Spouse.

Naturally, if he is our Spouse – as he must be of us all, focolarini, volunteers - the Spouse of our soul is Jesus forsaken – we can't rid ourselves of him. We must embrace him. So we embrace him, we try to embrace him. You yourself have understood that you've gone a bit wrong at times because you haven't done this act of love. Because we shouldn't only love Jesus forsaken in suffering. The true, whole Jesus forsaken is Jesus forsaken who suffers, "My God, why...?" almost as if, theologians say, almost as if the Trinity is being broken up. It's not true, but he felt this as a man. But then he immediately said, even though he felt abandoned by the Father, so it was an infinite tragedy, he said, with immense effort: "Into your hands, Father, I commend my spirit.... I throw myself wholeheartedly into you, even if you abandoned me." He found the solution.

We too, when there is Jesus forsaken, when there is a suffering, we must say: it's you; you are the Spouse of my soul. Whether you are married or not on this earth doesn't matter – the soul is something else, and you say: "I want you, I love you, and I embrace you." Doing what he did: into your hands... Going beyond the suffering.

And then – we must be careful here – you must live the next present moment with all your heart. If you live it, what happens? You find peace, you find joy; the burden of suffering isn't there anymore. It's not there. Why isn't it there? Because in the place of Jesus forsaken who was living in you, the Risen Lord emerged, and the risen Lord is his Spirit who distributes his gifts, so you feel joy, peace and strength... the opposite of what you felt before...

So my advice is: embrace him completely, live the next present moment and go ahead.

If we have spread all over the world, we owe it to this; because by starting again and again, we have made every obstacle become a springboard. There was the obstacle of a suffering and instead of running away from it, we tried – perhaps making a thousand mistakes - but then we managed to face it and turned the obstacle into a springboard. And so, a springboard here, and there and there; and we spread to the ends of the earth. (Applause)