

The Last Week

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Let us understand that today we are living through something very important in the world, and in the Church. We are in the presence of springtime in the Church, of a renewal in the Church, yet in the midst of a world whose structure is crumbling. What was once a Christian culture is falling apart, it is disappearing. And so we must be very attentive to the way we are living it. It is remarkable to see how attentive the Holy Father (Pope John-Paul II) is to this renewal.

And so during these few days, let us try to look at Scripture, and especially at Jesus, Mary and Saint John. Let us try to understand this last week in the way Saint John describes it in his Gospel, the last week of Jesus on earth. The Church also has to go through her own last week. It may be understood literally as a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday ... But this is not what we are looking at. Rather, we are examining the last stage of the life of the Church. I believe that the Church will have to live through something that is analogous to the last week of Jesus. By looking at the last week as Saint John describes it, we see how it really corresponds to the grace of Lent. Our Lent would be true only if we examine attentively Jesus' last week. It is extremely rich. It is Saint John who has succeeded in really describing fully this last week of Jesus for us.

During the time of the Council (Vatican II), I can recall going to Rome a day before an encyclical was to be published. This was a time of great turmoil. Many people were asking themselves: "Is the Holy Father going to write an encyclical during the Council? Isn't it the duty of the Holy Father to remain silent (at this moment) in order to let the Fathers of the Council speak?" But some were (also) saying: "No. When there is danger, the Holy Father has to speak." The fact is that only the second solution holds. During a Council, the Holy Father is not on a vacation, and not only is the meaning of the Council derived from the presence of the Holy Father, but that the Holy Father is usually present at all the meetings. This was the case for the first Vatican Council.

The Holy Father was not always present during the second Vatican Council, but he looked at everything afterwards. To some extent, out of humility Pope John XXIII did this; people asked him why. He responded that since the previous Pope acted in this way, it would be better to continue in the same manner. I knew the theologian whom the Holy Father, Pope Paul VI, invited each evening in order to review with him all the decisions of the Council fathers. He would read attentively each one of the documents to the Holy Father in order to make sure that nothing would be in opposition to the Tradition of the Church. It was this very theologian who told me this. He was a Dominican and was a little bit harsh. He was chosen by the Holy Father on that account. and thereby showed how much he wanted to make sure that nothing would go against the

Tradition of the Church, so that nothing would be understood in an erroneous manner.

I remember going to Rome at another occasion. There among the French Bishops was one whom I knew very well. He was the Bishop for the foreigners in Paris, somebody whom I deeply loved and knew very well. When he saw me, he told me that there was something that was bothering him. He said that during the Council nobody was condemning when there was so much (that needed) to be condemned. "How is it that this Council did not condemn anybody?" I said to him, "I understand your fear, but if the Church is entering into her last week through this Council, wouldn't that be normal? When you look at the Gospel according to Saint John, you see that in the last week Jesus no longer condemns anybody. He accepts to bear the iniquity of the world in order to be crucified. If the Church is entering her last week analogically speaking, wouldn't it be normal that she too no longer condemns anybody? She accepts to be on the Cross in order to be with Jesus during this last week."

We discussed on this theme a great deal. I had been studying the last week for a long time now and it impresses me profoundly for it describes the last moments of Jesus on earth. When I said this to the Bishop, he said. "Now I understand." I was very "enlightened" to see this Bishop attempting to look at Vatican II under this light.

So if you wish, we can look together at His last week in the Gospel of Saint John. It starts with chapter twelve. Before the last week, it is Jesus who is the one leading the events; He is the one making the decisions. But what strikes me as being characteristic of the last week is that Jesus no longer leads.

You have the first gesture of Mary in Bethany, a gesture expressing the folly of love. She manifests such an incredible lack of prudence when you take into consideration the situation in Jerusalem at that moment in time. Perhaps the sisters of Lazarus were not aware of what the Jews were planning to do at that time; or if she did know, Jesus had nevertheless allowed her to perform this gesture.

The second gesture - also a folly - is the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. This again is a gesture manifesting the folly of love as seen through the initiatives of the populace of Jerusalem. Jesus responds to these initiatives which are not coming from Him. The first initiative that Jesus receives is, in fact, the washing of the feet.

Even if we must have to go very fast, I would at least like to try and understand those things surrounding this last week. Following after the great vision from Isaiah, we are here truly in front of the Lamb who is being led to the slaughter. Through this passivity of the Lamb, there are initiatives which are received by Jesus the High Priest. The mystery of the last week is the mystery of

Jesus victim and High Priest. In fact, these are one and the same mystery. What is so impressive is how the mystery of the Lamb envelopes the mystery of the Priest. It is essential that we understand this.

Today, we speak about the royal priesthood of the faithful. We have been speaking a great deal about this ever since the Council, whereas this was not spoken much about before. It is the mystery of the Lamb. Mary is the first one to live by (or participate in) this mystery of the royal priesthood of the faithful, and she lives it in unity with Jesus the Lamb. The whole Church is (also) going to live by this mystery of Jesus the Lamb. This, I think, is what profoundly moves the Church of today. It is what Jesus asks of His little ones, and this leads Him on to take initiatives as the High Priest. The Priesthood of Christ is the Priesthood of the Son. It is a Priesthood of love such that the initiatives of the Priest and the passivity of the Lamb are one.

It is clear how this last week, beginning from the anointing at Bethany up to the piercing of the Heart, demonstrates the poverty of the Lamb. It is only as Lamb that Jesus is able to deliver those words pronounced in front of Judas: "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." These words are meaningful only because Jesus is Lamb. Otherwise, it would be an injustice if it were Jesus demanding that we make an opposition between Him and the poor. The fact is that Jesus came for them and shows that He is the "poor" (one par excellence). The mystery of the Lamb is the mystery of the poor (one); it (evokes) the poverty of love. This poverty is manifested in an ultimate manner through the wounding of the heart which really is the center of this last week. We can just stop here, for this is where we can see the really poverty of the last week. We must understand how the ultimate manifestation of Jesus is His manifestation as Lamb. This indeed is John the Baptist's first proclamation according to the Gospel of Saint John: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. "

Let us now read chapter twelve together - the starting point for this last week. "Six days before Passover Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead." It was Jesus who certainly took this initiative to come to Bethany, although it was in fact only a response to an invitation. The two sisters had obviously prepared everything. Jesus did not come like a thief. It was in fact, the two sisters of Lazarus who had taken the initiative. They hosted a dinner for Him; it was not an impromptu one. Martha was serving and Lazarus was one of those reclining at table with Him. Note the importance that is being accorded to Lazarus. The two sisters were there in order to thank - Jesus for the resurrection of Lazarus. This was a meal of thanksgiving. This thanksgiving meal was very unique wherein Lazarus was there giving honor to his guests. This meal was a gesture of thanksgiving to Jesus who raised him from the dead. I do not know if the twelve went often to Bethany. I do not think so. I rather think that it was a place of silence reserved for Jesus. Peter, James and John went to Bethany when the Ascension took place. Note how the wisdom

of God always makes distinctions and hates confusion. Bethany is a place of friendship, a place of thanksgiving.

"Mary took a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil." We can immediately see the character given to this meal of thanksgiving; that it is a gesture of pure gratuitousness wherein Mary takes the initiative. It was even probably on her initiative that Jesus was invited by them. I think this was so. She must have told Martha, "We cannot but invite Jesus in order to thank Him." Such is Mary's "delicatessen (a loving attentive consideration?). Martha was very happy. The more activity there was expected of her, the happier she would be! Such is Martha's generosity. Martha is generosity while Mary is discretion, but a discretion which can go so far in thanksgiving. This is manifested through her gesture. Mary gives Him a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard. Mary had kept an astonishing reserve: a liter of costly perfumed oil, the last secret reserve of Mary. We will ask Mary in heaven what it was! I have a small hypothesis: if Mary is the converted sinner - she probably had many costly perfumed oils. But when she converted, she most probably got rid of them ... but she kept this last one. She kept it not for herself, but in order to manifest her love for Jesus. This is where you can see the "delicatessen of Mary. If it were Martha, she would have sold everything. Mary however kept this perfume and Martha was not aware of it for Martha would not have understood. And so Mary kept this costly perfume for Jesus, a liter.

Mary understood the tragedy which this last week stood for. From the depths of her heart, she knew that this was the last week. She was aware of the tensions that existed; the Jews had made the decision to kill Jesus, and Mary surely knew of this. This allows us to understand why under the motion of the Holy Spirit; she wanted to show Jesus, in silence, how much she loved Him, how much she wanted to thank Him for everything, not only for raising Lazarus but for so much more. The resurrection of Lazarus served only an opportunity for her to do this. There was something so much greater in the heart of Mary. It is her response to the love of the Heart of Jesus, Jesus loved her in a unique way, and she wanted to manifest her thanks in a gesture of gratitude. Perfume would express this very well. The costly perfume would express in a symbolic way all of her tenderness, her thanksgiving, and all her love for Jesus. She knew that it was because of her tears after the death of Lazarus which moved the Heart of Jesus, and she thanks Jesus for this. Jesus received her tears and responded royally - as only the Son of God would. We need to be very attentive to this. She first anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair - the gestures of a sinner, crying and drying. These are the gestures from someone who knows how much Jesus loves her in order to show Him that she is still the sinner - the sinner who is loved, the forgiven one. This does not at all pertain to a psychological revisiting of her past. Instead, Mary uses her condition as sinner in order to better manifest her love. Take note of these two extreme situations. She dried the feet of Jesus with her hair and poured costly perfume, both manifesting at the same time

extreme poverty and superabundance. This is so important. She could have simply poured her costly perfume on the feet of Jesus. That would have sufficed. But no, she also wanted to embrace Him with her own poverty, with her own misery. The whole house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. This reveals the quality of the perfume she used; it filled the whole house. Her thanksgiving is very realistic, and she performs this gesture in order to express her love for Jesus. At that moment, I believe that all those who were present understood what she was doing. There must have been such a great silence. When a gesture of such gratitude and magnificence is performed, everyone is moved by this love. One can only be moved by such gesture of great gratitude and magnificent love; especially one that is coming from a woman - one whom Jesus loves.

According to the Gospel recounted by John, I believe that Judas betrayed out of jealousy. I think that he was unable to bear the love Jesus had for John. This is my own interpretation. But when I examine the Gospel according to John, it is at this moment when the attitude of Judas is most explicitly shown. It is important that we understand how the peak moments of the struggle were brought about by jealousy. There is a complex of jealousies that we must consider: the jealousy of Judas and the jealousy of the High Priest. The cooperation between these jealousies provoked the condemnation and the death of Jesus. John underlines this: "Judas the Iscariot, one of His disciples and the one who would betray Him, said, 'Why was this oil not sold for 300 days' wages and given to the poor?'" Through these words, I believe that Judas was expressing his anger on account of this gesture of love - a gesture which reminded him of the love that Jesus had for John.

We are aware of the extent that devil has gone in attacking Fatherhood during the past century. At times, he even attacks Motherhood in order to get at Fatherhood - since the motherhood of Mary has no other reason than to help us discover what Fatherhood is. Mary, the admirable mother, is thus an extremely poor mother; a mother who is entirely given in order to help us enter into the (heavenly) Father's Fatherhood. This is the reason why our consecration prayer to Mary (after each Mass) has us immediately gaze at her as the daughter (Immaculate child) of the Father. It is this daughter of the Father who wants to help us enter into her deepest secrets. Now what is deepest in the heart of Mary is her bond with the Father. The Father has given her His Son so that she might enter more deeply into His Fatherhood. She is associated in a certain way into His Fatherhood. In the wisdom of God, her entire motherhood has no other end than to manifest to us this Fatherhood. This is the reason why the two main attacks of the devil are directed towards the motherhood of Mary and Fatherhood. The ideology of Freud has attacked fatherhood; not God's Fatherhood directly, but human Fatherhood. One of Freud's disciples who wanted to be more "Freudian" than Freud himself has even gone as far as attacking motherhood as if to say that it is what is most perverted in the heart of man and woman.

But we have to be able to detect the ruse of the devil. We are not allowed to say that we are not interested in what he does, especially when he is (now) very noisy. We must do all we can to understand the devil. We know that he is always angry at the mystery of the Most Blessed Trinity and at the mystery of Redemption. His anger must help us better understand the secret of the wisdom of God; a secret being prepared for us which the devil has no knowledge of. He is ignorant of it and is curious.

Our Church today is going through a struggle which goes very deep. As I was telling you, when you look at the Freudian ideology, you will see that it is in opposition against the Beatitude of the Peaceful, the Peacemakers. This ideology brings forward the Freudian stance and tries to take it even further. By doing so, it goes against the human dispositions which allow for the Beatitude of the Peacemakers.

Mary Mother and Queen: Mary disposes us in such a way that the grace of Christ might be fully rooted in our hearts. This is why, upon looking at the attack of the devil against Fatherhood and Motherhood, we are able to say that we are in the presence of something ultimate. I believe that we should be very attentive to these attacks of the devil, especially during this season of Lent. On the first Sunday of Lent Jesus goes to the desert and is tempted. The Gospel according to John tells us that Jesus is tempted for our sake. Jesus does not need to be tempted: temptations do not strengthen Him as they usually do for us. Jesus accepts to be tempted, which is an abnormal situation for the Son of God. He is the Prince of Peace. Yet this Prince of Peace accepts to be tempted in the desert for us. The desert is the Church since it is the place of adoration. Martha Robin loved to say how the desert of God is Mary because, in the Church, the (ultimate) place of adoration is in the Hearts of Jesus and of Mary.

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus went to the desert in order to be tempted. We must be careful in understanding that to be tempted was not His finality. If Jesus goes to the desert, He does it out of love for us and in order to show us that we should not be afraid of the desert, even though we can be sure that will be more intense there. Jesus wanted to live through all these temptations out of love for us so that we might be victorious over all temptations, with Him and in Him, so that we might live them in love and no longer be afraid of them. The goal is not to look for temptations. But we can expect that if we go to the desert in order to adore, the devil will be behind us. He is always following us each time we try to be alone with God. This is because he does not want us to be alone with God. We are only able to adore once we get rid of all we value qualitatively within us, all that belongs to our conditioning which give us glory. We need to get rid of this all; the Book of revelation shows how we must throw down our crowns. We can only adore God once we get rid of our crowns and therefore accept to become the very small and fragile creature.

We are strengthened by adoration since it leads us back to the source: God our Creator. At the same time, adoration is also a source of fragility in us since it places us in front of our nothingness as the small creature that depends entirely on God. Our only strength is found in this poverty, the poverty of the small creature that is totally relative to God.

Going to the desert with Jesus implies accepting to face struggles. The whole season of Lent is a time of desert and of struggles, the very struggles of the Church. Not only are these struggles very special to those who are trying to grow closer to Jesus but they are the struggles of the entire Church. Let us be novices of the Holy Spirit during our entire life. If you have not yet understood this, then I hope you will this year: let Lent be a Novitiate for each one of us. The reason why Lent is often lived poorly is because we do not like at all to become novices of the Holy Spirit. We like building strong and solid fortifications in order to appear strong, We would rather place our strength in all that we have acquired.

We want to become like stars but the Holy Spirit demands that we come like little children, just like a small David in front of Goliath. This is another type of desert prefiguring the desert of Jesus. We see the small David facing Goliath who has been scourging the people of Israel. Goliath represents the culture of today much based on technique and efficiency. Today's mankind is enslaved by technique and science. The Holy Father is hurt (slighted) each time people look at the Church and the Papacy as things that were only good for the Middle Ages. I have heard scientists saying: "Yes, the Church and the Holy Father were only good for the Middle Ages but now they are out-dated." Telling someone that he is surpassed by science and technology is a supreme insult.

As a consequence of this modern attitude, the scientists (of today) refuse to listen to what the Church has to say on matters that concern the human person. Everything that she says is rejected as something that was only good for the Middle Ages. Today what the Church has to say has been totally surpassed. What they believe is that the truth which is increasingly dependent on science and therefore has to change according to the (progress of) science. Such is our culture of today. This is the struggle between the little David and Goliath all over again. Now when David wanted to fight against Goliath, the king of Israel gave him his own armor. The small David tried to use the armor but he was not at ease with it. He finally got rid of it and therefore faced Goliath without any armor at all. Goliath took this as the supreme insult for he himself relied on his armor while David counted only on God's help plus a very poor weapon (slingshot). We all know how God made David victorious and how he placed his practical intelligence at the service of his love. David saw Goliath's fragility. He saw where his vulnerability was, and that is where he struck him.

The way our society is living in today is, I think, very similar to the great struggle that was waged against Goliath. Goliath was very powerful and was so aware of the power coming from his technique and science. Today, mankind believes that he is no longer in need of a Savior. The Holy Father said this deliberately. The first time he went to Paris, he gathered together all the French Bishops and told them how the Church was facing a kind of meta-temptation, one which she has never faced before. This is an entirely different type of temptation. The Holy Father expounded how this temptation is one that is radical - totally beyond any other type of temptation there is: after having reached the age of adulthood, mankind believes that he no longer needs a Savior. Mankind wants to save himself. Today's culture has no longer any room left for Jesus as Savior. No other Holy Father has ever said this before and this is something very impressive. What is even more impressive for me is that after this encounter, not one Bishop repeated this words even though it was the major message that the Holy Father gave to all the French Bishops at that time.

People today are afraid to admit that we are in (a time of) an ultimate struggle. This might just well be a preparation for a marvelous renewal, or else it might be the preparation for an ultimate springtime in the Church which culminates with the return of Christ. We just don't know. You don't and neither do I. But still, we must examine and try to understand this. Christ came to earth in Mary's womb; He had a small place of shelter. Mary received Him in love and carried Him with love. Yet once He was born and thereby took His place amongst men, He was told that there was no longer any room for Him in Bethlehem. This was what was said in Bethlehem from the offspring of David - and hence from those who represented the best in Israel. But Jesus was the most noble amongst the offspring of David, and yet there was no room for Him. How sad is this. In the Gospel according to Saint John, the High Priest said, "We have only one king, Caesar. 11 They refused the Kingship of Christ because He came as the Lamb of God. The King was the Lamb, the One who accepts to carry the iniquity of the world in His Heart, and yet He was rejected while He chooses to be responsible for the entire Church.

The Holy Father proclaims that there is no longer any room for a Savior in today's world. These words are so powerful that they allow us to understand in depth the struggle that we are going through. On our own, we are unable to know exactly where we are in this struggle since we are right there buried in its midst. We instinctively try to avoid this struggle by saying, "in any case, it has always been there;" and although we are fighting in the Church, we are afraid to face what is actually happening. But we should not be afraid. We must instead look at these things that are going on through the eyes of Jesus and Mary and we should also try to understand these words spoken by the Holy Father. Know that in his first encyclical, the Holy Father underlined something very important. He said that although our small planet has been made habitable through mankind's victory over wild and dangerous animals, nevertheless and because of his desire to dominate, man has used his intelligence to fashion increasingly dangerous

armaments, weapons which are way much more dangerous than any wild animal. Animals normally have good hearts. This is true even when they were still wild. Having good hearts, we simply have to be good towards them in order to allow their goodness to become apparent. Animals attack when we attack them. In eastern Africa where it is not permissible to hunt, animals come very near you, even the good lions. For as long as you do not come near them when they are hungry, everything would be fine. You can sit with them at the same table... for dessert and not for the meat! Animals really have an essential goodness, whereas armaments do not. Weapons are continually being designed in order to kill, terminate, and destroy with greater efficacy. We know that mankind possesses power for destruction. We clearly see how this situation is similar to having a sword hanging above, over our heads. This is a source of anguish (anxiety) in the heart of man.

Scripture presents anguish (anxiety) as the ultimate sign preceding the return of Christ. It is not war but anguish. We can find this in the Book of Revelation as well as in the entire Scripture. Today, we can see how this anguish is so present and increasing. The Holy Father asked himself this question, "Does man have the courage to go beyond what he has made in those weapons? Will man ever have the courage to surpass this capital of power and destruction which he has created?" Animals were not created by man unlike the weapons he has created. It is always very difficult (challenging) to achieve (complete or finish) a work and then to go beyond it in a holocaust of love. I think that the Holy Father's first encyclical, which has been forgotten, is very important. We are living in a state of anguish all over the world. Now the Book of Revelation underlines how anguish will be worldwide. Everywhere, man can see this in his fellow men. This is the fragility, the fundamental vulnerability of today's man. But we should not fear this for we are children of God and we know that in Jesus, our Father loves us.

We must rediscover what fatherhood is and what is most radical in it. God is allowing this increasing anguish. He permits man to continue building more dangerous weapons. Thanks to this, man is able to manifest his power. In the most intimate depths of our heart, God wants anguish to be overcome by the Gift of Fear. Fear is the beginning of Wisdom. When we find ourselves in front of this anguish, we need to understand that the Holy Spirit is within our heart with His divine capacity to transform us. We can unite ourselves to the Heart of Christ through the Gift of Fear and thus use this anguish to open us up towards a deeper abandonment to the Divine One. We have to place ourselves totally in God's hands and become more and more like children. like sons of the Father. I believe that this is the great corresponding grace in response to what we are living through today. This should be the greatest grace during this time of Lent. Enter ever more deeply into an abandonment of love so that might really be able to place yourselves in the hands of the Father. See how much the Father loves us, we are His beloved children.

We are currently going through a time of fragility which is greater than what was seen during the beginning of the century or during the previous century. Our world is so fragile today since it has been fully delivered into the hands of mankind. We know that there will not be another deluge. God does not want to put an end to mankind. He promised Noah that He would never send a flood again. In saying this God was handing on to mankind the responsibility over itself. God will therefore never stop on giving mankind His paternal protection, even if man commits the worst possible mistakes out of pride, of his desire for domination, or of his desire to claim power over life and death. God has left man in his freedom to choose. We must therefore ask ourselves this question: "How far will God allow us to go (with this freedom)?" We don't know. We cannot tell Him: "You know what, God; you cannot just allow us to go on any further?" We know that God leaves mankind the responsibility over himself. This is really something that is very special and perhaps, this might be what we are living through in our time. The Holy Father speaks of a meta-temptation. The Holy Father knows and proclaims that the Church has never gone through this kind of temptation. It seems that the Holy Father really wants us to really take heed of this since he calls our attention to it. But there is not much that we can do. For example, we cannot say that we should stop all scientific research. In taking into consideration of the capability for man to destroy humanity, we are not able to do anything at that level either. It seems as if our hands and our feet have been restrained, tied up. Furthermore, no one listen to the Church anymore. People listen more to scientists and men of technique but no longer to the Church and she is aware of this. Such is the Holy Father's source of great suffering, a weight that he bears. Man wants to achieve adulthood on his own. He ignores the fact how the Father has given man His only Beloved Son as mankind's only Savior. Man, on the other hand, no longer wants to acknowledge this. Again, such is the deepest suffering of the Holy Father as it is also the most profound suffering of today's Christian; this is what we have to live through in today's world. We need to ask the Virgin Mary for her peace and for her awareness; Mary does not want us to fall into this state of anguish. Yet she also wants us to be fully cognizant of what is happening in the world today so that we might bear it with her, in order that we might carry it through a victory of love - a Pentecost of love linked to her mystery of Assumption and the great victory of love that flows from the Cross.

This great victory of love is shown to us - manifested to us - through the mystery of the Assumption of Mary. Everything in Mary is the Assumption that manifests this victory of love.