

Fifth Sunday of Easter C: May 15, 2022  
"This is how all will know you for My disciples..."

Before I launch into this commentary on our Gospel passage, let me point out that I am deeply indebted to the work of Fr. Ignace de la Potterie and his brilliant little book *The Hour of Jesus*, which has helped me better understand the fourth Gospel of the Lord. Our Gospel passage for this Sunday, taken from St. John, is a rather short one, and cannot be understood unless we put it in its proper context. What is that context? Two points, I think, can help set us on the right road to best understand the lesson Jesus is trying to teach us.

Did you ever walk into a room of people, either people you know or people that you don't know, and have the strange, unpleasant feeling that you've walked into the middle of 'something?' In one of those moments, when you experience it, that you wish you could disappear, or turn back the hands of time, or whatever, just, to get the heck out. In any event, the Gospel passage for our Holy Mass is not unlike that kind of a situation, in that, a whole lot of *things* have been happening, and, if you don't know what those *things* are, you're sort of left in the dark. What are those *things*?

The first *thing* we must keep in mind is the words with which this chapter, i.e., chapter thirteen, begins: "Before the Feast of Passover, Jesus realized that the hour had come for Him to pass from this world to the Father. He had loved His own in the world, and would show His love for them to the end." (St. John 13. 1) So, the first thing to remember, in hearing this Gospel, is that in entering into this Passover meal, Jesus is entering into *His hour*.

The second *thing* to be mindful of, in the midst of *His hour*, that is, what has transpired in the preceding verses are two small but profound dramas, both of which are intertwined: the Lord has washed the feet of His Apostles; and Jesus foretells the rising up and betrayal of Judas, who, upon *dipping the dish* with Jesus subsequently leaves the Upper Room ("and Jesus said to him: 'Do what you must, and do it quickly!'")

Let us remind ourselves that Jesus, the Man Who is God, has set Himself to *love His disciples to the end*, and *the end* means precisely His bitter Passion and death. Let us also be perfectly clear about the fact, regardless of what some so-called intellectuals might say today, that Jesus *knew* precisely Who He was and what was in store for Him.

Now, when I say, *Jesus knew Who He was*, let me be clear to point out what I am saying and what I am not saying. Some words borrowed from the great scholar, Fr. Ignace de la Potterie, can explain what I am trying to say far better than I. When I say that Jesus knew Who he was, I am

referring to His 'self-awareness.' Thus, Fr. de la Potterie writes:

In what did this awareness consist? Certainly not in that he knew it clearly and could say 'I am the Son of God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity.' That would be impossible for a human awareness. But Jesus experienced it existentially and lived it in his fundamental attitude of obedience to the Father. That is of capital importance. J. Lebreton, in his *History of the Dogma of the Trinity*, writes that the apparent paradox of the Fourth Gospel consists in the fact that John, the theologian, is the one who most firmly stresses the divine Sonship of Jesus, and on the other hand underlines most strongly the submission and the obedience of Jesus to his Father. Is this a paradox? In no way. The Fathers of the Church, in particular, Hilary of Poitiers, have written some very fine things on this subject. The Greek Fathers express it in their own way: 'being Son' signifies a complete '*esse ex alio*,' to be totally from another. The experience and the exercise of this 'being Son' expresses itself existentially in obedience. That of Jesus, so strongly emphasized by John, is nothing other than existential, the transposition into experience of the profound reality of his 'being Son.' 'I come from the Father' is one of the finest expressions of this mystery. (1)

Another, shorter more compact way to understand this mystery of 'being Son,' of this 'coming from the Father,' is to hearken back to another passage of St. John, where Jesus speaks the words: "... *it is not to do My own will that I have come down from Heaven, but to do the will of Him Who sent Me.*" (St. John 6.38) Or, boiled down one step further, as one of my professors once said: "Do you want to understand Jesus and His message? It's this! Let Me tell you about My Father!" Now, reading all of this, one can begin to see how powerful the message Jesus gives us when He told us: "*the Father and I are one!*" (St. John 10. 30)

Jesus knew Who and What He was, that He and the Father are one. Now He tells us, with a clear vision of His passion and death before Him: "*Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him.*" (St. John 13. 31) How is this, what does this mean? Jesus knows that He is to be raised up on a Cross, to suffer the agony and death of the Cross: "*My children* [such eternally tender words – like a father to dearly beloved children!] *I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you should love one another.*" (St. John 13. 33a-34)

The word that Jesus uses today – *glorified* – is closely connected to an expression found three times in the Gospel of St. John, the expression being that Jesus will be 'lifted up.' As Fr. de la Potterie points out:

According to the divine plan... it is necessary for the Son of Man to be 'lifted up.' Thus the same expression 'to be lifted up' occurs three times (3:14-15; 8:28; 12:32); ... in Latin *exaltari*, (which can also be translated 'to be exalted' – *my translation*.) Since this expression in connection with the Passion of Jesus is proper to John, we must analyze it in more detail. (2)

Fr. de la Potterie reminds us of a very simple point regarding the notion of being 'lifted up.' In the ancient world, or, for that matter, even in the world of today, "in ruling over the people the king was 'lifted up.' This was the image the author, [that is, St. John] had in mind and which he employed to evoke the theme of the kingly power on the Cross. Thus de la Potterie goes on to explain:

Jesus is lifted up on the cross – the opposite of the grain of wheat which falls into the ground and dies – but it is to die that he is lifted up above the ground. The death of the grain of wheat gives rise on the natural level to a new life; the death of Jesus does the same on the supernatural level. Obviously the parallelism must not be taken literally. It is not a question of being lifted up towards heaven, but of an 'elevation' on the cross which takes on a symbolic meaning... It is not a question of raising him from the earth on the way to heaven; on the cross Jesus occupies the dignity like that of a king who rules over his people. In John, therefore, there is a transposition: to the material meaning of the elevation on the cross there is added a symbolical meaning of the term 'to be lifted up' to illustrate the theme of the kingship of Christ, so dear to the evangelist. (3)

Once we can understand that Jesus' *glorification* **is** His elevation on the Cross because it is the very thing which proves, once and for all, and for all time, the very words that began this chapter thirteen: "*Having loved His own in the world, He would love them to **the end.***"

Nearly two thousand years ago, a Roman lawyer by the name of Minutius Felix, living at the end of the second century, was converted to the Faith because he observed the Christians and their love for one another. He wrote: Christians loved one another "even before they knew one another." This miracle of charity caused the great Biblical scholar, Fr. LeCamus to observe: thus "paganism was filled with admiration, and, having studied them [the Christians] more closely, became Christian in order to imitate them." (4)

A question, perhaps rather a difficult question with no immediate answer, at least, no immediate answer for the present. What about you and me? What if the Lord wants to *glorify* you or me? By that I mean, what if in some way the Lord has a Cross waiting for us, or, perhaps, one of us is enduring a silent – or not-so-silent Cross - even now? I must admit there are times when the Lord has seemingly called me to a Cross and, I must say, I feel more like Judas than like St. Peter or St. John. When a Cross appears from out of nowhere, and my heart rebels, first of all, I must be *very little*, I must remember to be a *very little child*, and run to the arms of Mary and Jesus, just like that, like a little child, with all of my feelings, good, bad, no matter what, unashamed of the torrent of my emotions, just like a little child. Then, perhaps these words of St. Josemaría might prove helpful, but only after you have time to accept that Cross –

whenever Jesus and Mary have given you the strength and surrender to do so:

At times the Cross appears without our looking for it: it is Christ who is seeking us out. And if by chance, before this unexpected Cross which, perhaps, is therefore more difficult to understand, your heart were to show repugnance... don't give it consolations. And, filled with a noble compassion, when it asks for them, say to it slowly, as one speaking in confidence: 'Heart, heart on the Cross! Heart on the Cross!' (5)

1. Fr. Ignace de la Potterie, S.J., *The Hour of Jesus*, Alba House, New York, 1997, pgs. 17-18
2. *Ibid.*, pg. 15
3. *Ibid.*, pgs. 7-8
4. Mons. É. LeCamus, *The Life of Christ*, vol. 3 of 3, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1945, pg. 207
5. St. Josemaría Escrivá, *Way of the Cross*, Fifth Station