

## Reflecting with Jeanne Chézard de Matel: Fifth Sunday of Lent A

*Journal 1, [173]*

Text selection: Sister Mildred Truchard IWBS

Translation and commentary: Sister M. Clare Underbrink IWBS

The reflection for the Fifth Sunday of Lent is the beginning of a long discourse that combines the themes of love and suffering, death and resurrection, the motivation and means of salvation. Jeanne begins with a paraphrase of John 3:16, indicating that she intends to discuss God's tremendous love for humans:

God so loved the world that he gave his own Son to redeem it. Wisdom has not judged it right to speak much about this, but has left us to meditate and ponder it. Should I dare elaborate on it by stuttering what you have taught me, O God-Man, who have so loved humankind?

Jeanne is so overwhelmed at the love of God that she feels incapable of expressing what she has pondered and meditated. The statement that not much has been said about "this" probably refers to the paucity of verses in the Gospels that speak directly of God sending his Son to save us. There is an allusion in the Parable of the Tenants<sup>1</sup>, but no other explicit reference outside of John 3:16. Four references in the Epistles mention God sending his Son for our redemption<sup>2</sup>. Jeanne is very familiar with the Scriptures, quoting them liberally in Latin and often explaining passages in French. She meditates so regularly on the Scriptures that they become a part of her<sup>3</sup>, and she sometimes makes connections between verses that seem unusual to others. Here, she links John 3:16 to the raising of Lazarus. She addresses Jesus directly:

The Jews, seeing your reaction at the raising of Lazarus, said "See how much he loved him!" (Jn. 11:36). Your inner turmoil, shuddering in your spirit, your face covered with tears, made them say these words. I shall express what I can, my Love. It will be very little, but as you did, I leave to be pondered what I neither know nor say.

The Jews' reaction, "See how much he loved" echoes Jeanne's reading of John 3:16: "See how much God loves". Jesus' anguish at the death of Lazarus foreshadows his own agony, motivated by such a tremendous love that it causes him great inner turmoil. Jeanne says that she has very little to say, yet she goes on for eleven

---

<sup>1</sup> See Mk. 12:6 and parallels in Mt. 21:37 and Lk. 20:13. Interestingly, in the parable, the owner of the vineyard thinks that the tenants will respect his son, but instead they kill him.

<sup>2</sup> See Rm. 8:3, 13; Gal. 4:4-5; 1 Jn. 4:9-10. Certainly one could also mention the letter to the Hebrews, and the Christological hymn in Phil. 2, however, in these it is Jesus who freely offers himself, not God who sends or gives his Son.

<sup>3</sup> This is unusual for a woman of her time, really for any mystic, male or female. Her ability to read, write, and understand Latin, and her command of the Scripture are remarkable. Also, whereas most mystics rely almost exclusively on revelations from God in prayer and use Scripture only to support or confirm their authenticity, Jeanne's own mystical experience includes a command from God to go to the Scriptures to meet him. This puts her in a unique position among the mystics of the modern period, and perhaps even the contemporary period.

manuscript pages, describing Jesus' Incarnation and Passion. She feels inadequate, as if she does not know enough, but Jesus knows it because he has suffered it:

You have known it and suffered because you were made King from the day you took our nature: King of martyrs, King of the afflicted and the only One afflicted for all of your subjects, by the prescription of divine power against human frailty, of divine wisdom against human folly, of divine goodness against human malice.

She uses poetic opposition to underline the human need for salvation and the total, gratuitous gift of God. She then turns to a classic (Anselmian) description of the "satisfaction theory"<sup>4</sup> to explain the Incarnation and the Redemption of Christ:

This human nature, having violated the divine dignity, was unable to carry the pains owed because of its crimes. What do you say, seeing this bankrupt humanity, incapable of suffering the harshness of the punishment merited? "Here I am, send me, my Father. I will go."

What Jeanne adds to the classical discussion is a strong focus on the love of God. God loved us enough to send his Son. Jesus loved us enough to become one of us, to take on our sins, to die for us. He did it, not out of necessity (because we were too frail to do it ourselves), and not just out of obedience (because the Father sent him). He did it voluntarily, out of an excess of love.

Jeanne continues for ten more pages, discoursing of the Incarnation and the Passion, going through the whole history of salvation wrought by the incredible love of God. She ends with a prayer, longing to be transformed into Christ, and quoting (in Latin) Paul's letter to the Galatians:

May I be completely transformed into Jesus crucified, afflicted in body and soul and reputation, may my love be crucified. I attach myself to your cross, O my king. I lose my life in yours. I dare to sing the triumph of my glory: "I live now, but not I; truly Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). Amen, Amen. May my heart be thus, I implore you by all that you are [183].

As we prepare to relive the Passion of Christ during these next few weeks, may we, too, be filled with a deep longing to be so transformed by God's love that we become willing to give ourselves totally.

---

<sup>4</sup> St. Anselm, in *Cur Deus Homo*, explains both the Incarnation and the Passion by saying that Jesus' death is only salvific because he is both human and God. Humans alone could not make satisfaction to God (pay the debt of our sin), because God is too far above us. God could not do it himself, because the offense was committed by humans, therefore, the debt had to be paid by someone who was both God and human. This is why, according to Anselm, God became flesh in Jesus Christ, so that he could make expiation for our sin.