

Reflecting with Jeanne Chézard de Matel: Palm Sunday A

Letter 3: To Father Barthelemy Jacquinot, S.J. from Roanne, November 3, 1620

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The Palm Sunday reflection is a short excerpt from a letter Jeanne writes to her spiritual director. She is struggling with prayer, worrying over small things, and very distressed at her lack of progress. She recounts how Jesus has at times led her up the mount of the Transfiguration, where she has experienced consolation so deep that she wanted to fall to the ground as did Peter. Now, Jesus is leading her up mount Calvary along with his Mother and the beloved disciple, to stand beneath the cross.

Jeanne says that when she hears this, her eyes respond with a “discourse of tears” because she understands that it is only in Jesus’ death that he is truly recognized as the Son of God. Similarly, she says, it is only in her own suffering that she will be recognized as a true disciple of Jesus. She has spent three years meditating on the Passion of Christ, thus it is no surprise that she feels a kinship with him in times of suffering.

In the passage below, Jeanne reflects on Luke’s Gospel, where Jesus weeps over Jerusalem just after his triumphal entry on Palm Sunday (cf. Lk 19: 41-44). She experiences Jesus speaking to her, almost consoling her with his own tears:

On Palm Sunday, when I saw the ignorance of my Jerusalem, “This I remembered and poured out my soul within me” (Ps. 42: 5), for, seeing this city, tears streamed from my eyes. My heart melted in sorrow. I went all through the streets to the Temple, where the tabernacle was, admired by all nations because God made it his dwelling. Five days later, I made a banquet of my own self, “with shouts of joy” (Ps. 42:5), so that my Apostles who were sad about my leaving would rejoice. My daughter, did I not say in the garden that I was sad unto death, with my only trust in my Father’s will?

She captures the contrasting joy and sorrow of Palm Sunday and Passion Week. There is the triumphal entry, then the weeping over the city; the joy of the gift of Eucharist on Holy Thursday, followed by the Passion; the death and burial followed by the Resurrection. Even the Psalm quoted here expresses, in the same verse, both sorrow and joy.

Jeanne describes Jesus’ heart melting within him, using an image that occurs often in her writings. Her heart melts or liquefies within her when she experiences a love so deep that she cannot contain it, and she feels incapable of living up to the love of God - yet another example of the mixture of sorrow and joy, wherein each accentuates the other. Jesus’ heart melts in sorrow, because of the depth of his love for those who reject him. He, himself is God, dwelling among those who do not recognize him, giving his own flesh and blood as food in the joyous banquet of the Eucharist, giving his own life in the agony of the cross. As Jeanne relates her own joys and struggles in prayer and in life to those of Jesus, she realizes that in times of deep distress, the only response is absolute trust in God, emulating Jesus in the garden.