

42. “If only you recognized God’s gift!” (Jn 4:10)

Never forget that in order to go to God, we must pass through Christ. Don’t let this word “pass” mislead you. It is not a question of going beyond Christ to reach God, as if God were waiting for us on the other side of Christ. It is only through Christ, with Christ, and *in* Christ that we can find the Father. That is why there is never anything better to do than to love Christ. That is why you have no need to fear that your mental prayer (which—you tell me—is a dialogue with Christ) will keep you away from the Father. “Philip, you still do not know that whoever has seen me has seen the Father?” (cf. Jn 14:9).

So let the friendship of Christ envelope you, take hold of you, and permeate you. But understand well this friendship that has arisen in your life in such an unexpected way.

You will find in it all the riches of human friendship, for Christ is truly man. His human nature is not merely a disguise temporarily assumed, and then thrown away after thirty-three years on this earth. The Son of God really became *flesh*, and he loves us with a heart of flesh, not with a love from some other world that we cannot understand.

Or rather, he does love us with a divine love that is altogether different from human love. But this love, to make itself understood, borrowed a man’s heart and expressed itself in human language. This word “human” is to be understood in a very encompassing sense. Not only did the Son of God *tell* us of his love with words (“I no longer speak of you as slaves,....Instead, I call you friends” (Jn 15:15). He went further, and *manifested* his love by his attitudes and actions. Think about this:

Some women came to Jesus, holding their children out to him so he could bless them. The Apostles, being serious men with no time for foolishness, reprimanded them. Then Jesus grasped these unkempt children, and took them into his arms as a sign of protest. It was as if to say, “Why would you refuse me this pleasure of dialoguing with these tiny children through looks and words?” (cf. Mk 10:13-16).

And when Luke shows us Christ as he encountered the pitiable procession carrying the only son of a widow to the cemetery, and tells us that Jesus was “*moved with pity*,” how can we doubt that Christ felt sorrow when he saw this tearful mother? (Cf. Lk 7:11-17).

Even more revealing is the scene recorded by St. John. When Jesus saw Mary overcome with sorrow over her brother’s death, “*he was troubled in spirit, moved by the deepest emotions*” and “*began to weep.*” The Jews were not mistaken when they commented, “*See how much he loved him!*” (Jn 11:33-36).

The profound humanity of Christ’s heart is made known to us in so many passages of the Gospels! His heart is so much more human than ours. We have so much trouble finding a middle ground between an overly human sensibility that is quickly out of control, and an inhuman self-control that becomes inflexible in order not to give in to emotion.

When you come close to Christ in mental prayer, let your faith strive to recognize his friendship. Let it be filled with wonder as it enumerates the unsearchable resources of his tenderness. Because Jesus loves you, he desires your presence and cannot fail to

rejoice at your coming to him. Because he loves you, he is impatient to shower his benefactions on you. As he himself has said from his own experience, “*there is more happiness in giving than receiving*” (Ac 20:35). And more happiness in forgiving than in giving. Because he loves you, he sympathizes in the strongest sense of the word: he *communes* with all of your sentiments.

Dare to believe that, in Christ’s love for us, all the nuances of human love are to be found. Believe that it is vibrant, cordial, warm, eager, and compassionate. You will be giving homage to the truth of the Incarnation. The hunted priest in Graham Greene’s *The Power and the Glory* did not discern this:

“It would be enough to scare us—God’s love. It set fire to a bush in the desert, didn’t it, and smashed open graves and set the dead walking in the dark? Oh, a man like me would run a mile to get away if he felt that love around.”

That is admirably put, and it is true in a certain sense. But what the priest fails to see is that this love (precisely in order to approach us without shocking us, in order to familiarize us with it—I feel like saying, “in order to tame us”) has revealed its Splendor to us, but filtered through the face of a man. It communicates its riches to us, but through the heart of a man.

Do not raise the objection that Christ is risen. While the Resurrection delivered him from the servitudes of mortal flesh—from fatigue and thirst, from sadness and anguish—it did not strip him of his tender and magnanimous humanity. Glory does not destroy nature, but perfects it.

That is why we must go to Christ with the trust of those Jewish children who refused to be deterred by the Apostles’ taunts.

On the other hand, we must avoid seeking only a wonderfully human friendship in our relationship with Christ. He offers us more. And so we, too, must hope for more when we come to him.

“When friendship does not encounter equality, it creates it.” Christ has verified this ancient adage. The love of the Son of God moves him to give us a share in his incomparable dignity. He wants to make us, children of the earth that we are, children of God. But to accomplish this, we must be reborn by Water and the Spirit. We must open ourselves, through the sacraments and prayer, to Christ’s divinizing action. We must be reborn, and not just once, but every day and at every moment. That is why it is a deadly mistake to separate ourselves from Christ. That is why we must maintain our contact with him, which only love can establish and preserve. Mental prayer is a privileged moment in this contact with Christ.

Why do Christians find it so hard to establish the link between two fundamental attitudes toward Christ? One sees him as the brother, the friend with the understanding and generous heart, and the other see the eternal Son of God as the source of all holiness. Christ is both man and God. There can be no question of separating and choosing. We cannot turn first to his human friendship, and then to his divinizing action. We cannot alternate between one and the other.

Since grace invites you to seek Christ’s friendship, do not hesitate. Come close to him. Offer yourself to the love of his heart, meek and humble, tender and strong. And do not look elsewhere to find the loftiest gifts of God. It is through the human tenderness of Christ that the torrent of divine life will pour into you. That is the great invention of God’s

love. It is through a fleshly, human heart, the heart of Christ, that this love has decided to transmit to us the life that wells up eternally within the communion of the Triune God.