

The Lifegiving Experience of Love: The Paradoxical Character of Love (Dis)closure

In the word of God, we can discern our identity and belonging to him and accept his unconditional love. This word lets us see who we are. We are called to listen to this complex divine (dis)closure and discern the mystery of the mission we are sent to fulfill from within our place in life-world. By manifesting himself in his glory, God transforms our lives, and we are changed (μεταμορφούμεθα, 2 Cor 3:18). Our engagement with the word of God requires full attention (προσ-έχω) to its formative and transformative power. In attending to ourselves (προσέχω ἑμαυτῶ), we are cleaving to the divine word and letting ourselves be brought in the nearness of God. Holding ourselves turned to God, we dedicate ourselves to the unfolding understanding of who we are. This turning to (ἐπιστρέφω) depicts literal and figurative reverting (στρέφω), coming back, converting. It is a dynamic change of direction (τροπή) happening in our hearts and minds.

Every encounter with the word of God manifests his nearness and invites us to experience divine self-revelation as the disclosure of Truth, a happening of grace, love, and mercy. Grace and Truth came into a more profound being with Jesus, who said of himself that he is the Truth (J 14: 6): “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me: Ἐγὼ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ· οὐδεὶς ἔρχεται πρὸς τὸν Πατέρα εἰ μὴ δι’ ἐμοῦ.” Coming into the world by Jesus (δι’ ἐμοῦ) indicates that it is he who disclosed the Truth to the world. He is the disclosure of Truth, the revelation of Revelation.

The divine light illuminates and thus determines our individual experience of faith and its actualization in the life of service. Celebrating Maundy Thursday (*mandatum*), we relive (*commemoro*) Jesus’s saturating our life with his love and commanding us to immerse ourselves in this love that calls for loving others. “I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another: ἐντολὴν καινὴν δίδωμι ὑμῖν, ἵνα ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους, καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς ἵνα καὶ ὑμεῖς ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους.” (J 13: 34) Here, the new commandment, ἐντολὴ καινὴ, means love one another, ἀγαπᾶτε ἀλλήλους. Further, Jesus speaks of the manner (καθὼς) according to which it should happen. The degree of that love should match the intensity of Jesus’s love for us: καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς. The new commandment, ἐντολὴ καινὴ (J 13: 34), new covenant, καινὴ διαθήκη (Lk 22: 20) is no doubt something absolutely essential and groundbreaking that evented (*sich ereignet*) during the Last Supper and determined how his disciples will live. The possible different aspects of the commandment—and covenant-character of Jesus’s salvific mission do not change the essence of its meaning: Living the eucharistic mysteries calls for loving and serving one another and complementing and

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mutually enhancing the legacy of Jesus preannounced (*vorherverkündigt*) during the sharing of the table with his disciples. The experience of sharing emphasizes the movement that brings forth (ποιέω) a community of people united in faith with God. The difficulty of facing existential dramas, including the tragic events leading to Jesus's death on the Cross, will not be overcome by this new eucharistic communion, which is not a ritual but a happening of love. At the same time, the belief that there is meaning in life because life comes from God and leads to him empowers the people of the new covenant to live the life of discipleship. In expressing his unconditional love and eucharistic hospitality, Jesus emphasizes the importance of every human being to him and calls for our responsiveness and generosity in accepting his invitation (*invitare* means being pleasant toward us and pursuing our company with vigor). He revolutionizes our understanding of God by telling us that the Eucharist is *someone* and not *something*, a *who* and not *what*.

The courage of kindness flows from discernment that motivates us to specific action and takes its cue from God's hospitality. Humbling ourselves according to the criteria of social evaluation is really nothing extraordinary. It is an understanding that we have received everything as a gift and are not entitled to anything. In 1 Cor 4: 7, St. Paul asks, "What do you have that you did not receive?": "τί δὲ ἔχετε ὃ οὐκ ἔλαβετε." We must be careful not to confuse our own generosity, understood as personal merit in helping those who lack something, with participation in the generosity of God, whose gifts are temporarily in our possession and which we share with others. The teaching of Jesus discloses the essence of being together with others, hence the *why* of our care for others: It is love and not social service, no matter how excellent and needed.

God Opens Up Our Hearts To Hear and Believe

In a famous yet quite perplexing exchange between Jesus and people who witnessed the multiplication of bread and fish to satisfy 5000 men and were seeking Jesus to ask him what they must do (ποιέω) so that they may be doing (ἐργάζομαι) the works of God (τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Θεοῦ, J 6: 28-29), Jesus answered clearly by saying what is truly needed *is done* by God: It is *his* doing (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ Θεοῦ). Therefore, it is the work (τὸ ἔργον in singular versus τὰ ἔργα in plural) of God that they believe (πιστεύω) in him, who is the one sent (ἀποστέλλω, hence apostle) by his Father.¹

¹ J 6: 28-29: εἶπον οὖν πρὸς αὐτόν Τί ποιῶμεν ἵνα ἐργαζώμεθα τὰ ἔργα τοῦ Θεοῦ; ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς Τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ ἔργον τοῦ Θεοῦ, ἵνα πιστεύητε εἰς ὃν ἀπέστειλεν ἐκεῖνος. Cf. Acts 16: 14.

What is calling our attention here is an understanding that the work of God (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ Θεοῦ) can be read as the subjective Genitive (*genetivus subjectivus*) as God's acting on behalf of his people, and not as the objective Genitive (*genetivus objectivus*) conveying people's work that God requires from them. It is God who makes us believe in him. Celebrating Jesus's Death and Resurrection, we rejoice in the gift of faith and proclaim solemnly that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life: Οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν κόσμον, ὥστε τὸν Υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ ἔδωκεν, ἵνα πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων εἰς αὐτὸν μὴ ἀπόληται ἀλλ' ἔχη ζωὴν αἰώνιον." (J 3: 16) The Good News finds its completion in the Cross and Resurrection. It is the ultimate message of salvation in which the divine proclamation is its own accomplishment: Accomplished by and in the word of God and is a continuing work of God for his chosen people (ο ἐκλεκτός λαός του Θεού). However, now the chosen (ἐκλέγομαι) are not only the people of the Old Covenant but all who let themselves be loved by God. The "so" (οὕτως) of love is equally its enormous amount and the manner in which this unconditional and infinite love is shown. What is utterly marvelous is that the receiver of this precious gift is the whole world (κόσμος), which is our life-world, where we are longing for the final coming of him to whom we belong and in whom we already are and not yet (*iam et nondum*).

Celebrating Jesus's Death and Resurrection as the new creation, we not only recollect the historical actions but commemorate the salvific events in their actual causative power. The liturgical celebration of the *Triduum Paschale* or *Triduum Sacrum* (*Sacrum Triduum Paschale Passionis et Resurrectionis Domini*) is a three-part drama of Christ's redemption extending from the Lord's Supper (*Coena Domini*) to the Early morning of the Resurrection. What is absolutely crucial in the dramaturgy of this holy eventing is the condensation of the experience of the beginning (ἀρχή, *Anfang*) that is seen from the perspective of the final τέλος (ἔσχατον) dominant happening in the instance of now (καίρος, *Augenblick*). The individual liturgies do not have their end. They act by interacting with each other till they (dis)close the Resurrected. What is happening in the celebration is the representation (*Vergegenwärtigung*), which accentuates the presence manifesting itself in an evident way.

The resurrected Jesus reveals himself by making himself present in the world and testifying that he is alive. This is the movement into presence, coming into presence, what Heidegger calls *anwesen*. Jesus is emerging from the tomb and reappearing (since he was dead) in a way he chooses and to whom he chooses. What is essential in this new appearance is the unfolding of the presence (*Anwesenheit*), which transgresses death, i.e., human finitude. From his Resurrection, Jesus will always be present in the dynamics of divine life among his people (omnes), for whom he gave his life. Therefore, the Angels were surprised at the reaction of the women, who came to the grave at the first

■ appearance of light in the sky and asked them why they were seeking the living among the dead: Τί ζητεῖτε τὸν ζῶντα μετὰ τῶν νεκρῶν. (Lk 24: 5)

Ecce Homo Novus: Human Being as the Epiphany of the Resurrected Jesus

Resurrection calls for sharpening the senses in our being in the world with Others. Particularly powerful and compelling is the experience of touching: Touching and being touched, also touching beyond death. Remarkable is an instance of Jesus's asking Mary, *noli me tangere*: "Do not touch me: Μή μου ἅπτου, οὔπω." (J 20: 17) Greek ἅπτομαι means to fasten to, to lay hold of, touch, know carnally. In Apostle Thomas's case (an unbelieving Thomas, ἀπιστος Θωμάς), touching the Risen One's body leads to faith. The verse J 20: 27 is beautifully puzzling: εἶτα λέγει τῷ Θωμᾷ· Φέρε τὸν δάκτυλόν σου ὧδε καὶ ἴδε τὰς χεῖράς μου, καὶ φέρε τὴν χεῖρά σου καὶ βάλε εἰς τὴν πλευράν μου, καὶ μὴ γίνου ἀπιστος ἀλλὰ πιστός. In a literal translation: Then he says to Thomas, bring your finger here and see my hands and bring your hand and put it into my sight, and not be unbelieving but believing. The touch of the finger (δάκτυλος) facilitates seeing (ὀράω - ἴδε). Seeing (ὀράω) means looking upon, experiencing, perceiving, discerning, and being beware. The touch allows discerning that the Resurrected is the same Jesus and not the same. This is the great mystery of unity, a fundamental task for thinking: How to embrace the same and not the same, also not reachable for us anymore or not yet, like in Heraclitus thinking of the river (ποτάμι).

The recognition of the Resurrected happens in movement: Intention, inter-est, and inter-action. Here, the body is of vital importance: Every detail tells something about pain and suffering, and love and trust. An encounter with Jesus is always an embodied experience. However, the Resurrected reminds us that, from now on, this embodiment will be understood differently. Offering his resurrected body to be touched, Jesus discloses the mystery of the transfiguration (μεταμορφώω). The new understanding of the touch unfolds the meaning of experience that brings about faith. We can read "*Noli me tangere*," as please pay attention to what transcends our encounter. Hence, the Resurrected encourages us to touch him in a new, more profound way. He touches us with this same healing power and opens us to seeing ourselves differently in the awareness of ourselves as part of his glorified body. "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new

creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”² (2 Cor 5: 16-17)

The new way of touching is particularly evident in the Eucharist. Becoming our Emmanuel, God with us (Ἐμμανουήλ), and resurrecting, God lets us touch him (*Berührenlassen*) and touches us. In his infinite greatness, he becomes so tiny that he fits into the palm of our hand, even in the idiomatic sense of releasing any control over our (mis)handling. Making himself easily approachable, he offers himself as the essential everyday nourishment (our daily bread, ἐπιούσιος ἄρτος, Mt 6:11) for our journeying. Here, the adjective “daily,” ἐπι-ούσιος, refers clearly to our being (οὐσία). Hence, we pray for what is necessary to take up the task of the day.

Celebrating Jesus, who is among us, we realize that in him we live, move, and have our being (Ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν, Acts 17: 28). Everything is new, but the metamorphosed past is everpresent in this newness. Jesus told us that we have prophets and him. This is our way (ὁδός) to him, who is the way, the truth, and the life (Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωή, J 14: 6) Jesus is our Pasch (*Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus*, Ο Ἰησοῦς εἶναι το Πάσχα μας). In his death and Resurrection is our departure from death (*exitum a/de morte*, ἐξοδος ἀπὸ τον θάνατο [προς τη ζωή]) and entrance into life (*introitus ad vitam*, εἰσοδος στη ζωή). It is a path from darkness into light (ἀπὸ το σκοτάδι στο φως). In Acts, we are told that turning from darkness to light can happen through the opening of the eyes: “ἀνοῖξαι ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτῶν, τοῦ ἐπιστρέψαι ἀπὸ σκοτόους εἰς φῶς.” (Acts 26: 18)

The true omnipotence of God is Jesus’s complete powerlessness in the face of human cruelty. In the freely accepted helplessness and humiliation of κένωσις, the greatness of God and his never-ending benevolent interest in human beings are revealed. When St. Paul speaks of Jesus’s self-emptying of the prerogatives of deity, he uses the verb ἐκένωσεν in ἐκένωσεν (aorist active indicative), indicating a one-time completed action of the past. (Phil 2; 7) God became a human being, loved and served his people, and they brought him to death. However, his dedication to the world was never shaken. He was, is, and always will be interested (*inter-esse*) in offering us eternal life (χαρίση την αιώνιον ζωήν). He longs to be with us and is concerned about the modus of this being together (*Miteiandersein*).

In our perception of the Cross, the reality of pain, suffering, and death must converge with that of the Resurrection, joy, and eternal glory. This is why the Cross is the tree of life, τό ξύλον τῆς ζωῆς (Rev 22: 2), and brings together the tree from the garden Eden and the heavenly Jerusalem. The messianic message of Jesus is the message of the

² 2 Cor 5: 16-17: Ὡστε ἡμεῖς ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν οὐδένα οἶδαμεν κατὰ σάρκα· εἰ καὶ ἐγνώκαμεν κατὰ σάρκα Χριστόν, ἀλλὰ νῦν οὐκέτι γινώσκομεν ὥστε εἶ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις· τὰ ἀρχαῖα παρῆλθεν, ἰδοὺ γέγονεν καινά.

salvation of the whole creation (κόσμος). Jesus became a human being to share our being in the world with Others and transform, like in his transfiguration (μεταμορφώω), the whole created world into the reigning of God (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ). Jesus is so determined to complete his mission that he vehemently opposes everything and everyone who stands in his way to the Cross. In the powerful dialectic of the Cross, the instrument of public punishment and humiliation is transformed into the vessel of salvation. The actual concealment (*Verbergung*) of this salvific mystery operates simultaneously as the unconcealment (*Entbergung*). The paradoxical dialectic meaning cannot be accessed through merely linguistic analysis. It is a matter of understanding the way divine revelation discloses itself for discernment and comprehension. The glory of God is made manifest. We need the eyes to see it. Crucifixion is the ultimate divine epiphany. It is God's self-manifestation that is brutally overshadowed by people's evil-doing. In Lifting up Jesus to the Cross, we see the repetition of the historical events. As in the case of the bronze serpent, the source of death can be, by divine power, turned into the source of life. This is a true divine paradox. In Jesus's death, we encounter this same paradox. Cross is the source of pain, suffering, and death and, at the same time, the fountain of life. Dialectic is not overcoming the opposites but the very dynamic of the opposites that has the potential to challenge and change human thinking.

Jesus's disciples, those who were closest to him, basically did not expect anything after his death. Moreover, they barricaded themselves (the doors were locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, J 20: 19). They even told the Risen One himself, unrecognized on the way to Emmaus, that they expected something different from Jesus (but we had hoped, ἡμεῖς δὲ ἠλπίζομεν, Lk 24: 21). Here, the verb ἐλπίζω, waiting, and hoping for noticeably refers to ἐλπίς, an expectation, hope and means active waiting and intense expecting the anticipated great things to happen. The poor disciples did not see or understand the message of the Resurrection. God's death is the manifestation of his life. By hiding in death, he is revealing his everlasting life. Hence, looking at the Cross is looking at the Risen One.

It was only later that Jesus himself truly converted them, allowing them to see him in a glory that was so different from any other earthly triumph. Jesus opened their eyes (their eyes were restrained, literally holden that they should not recognize Jesus: οἱ δὲ ὀφθαλμοὶ αὐτῶν ἐκρατοῦντο τοῦ μὴ ἐπιγνῶναι αὐτόν, Lk 24: 16). The verb ἐπιγινώσκω intensifies the experience of knowing, γινώσκω, and suggests that something essential was missing with regard to the intimacy between the disciples and the Risen One and was in need of supplementation. It was Jesus who gave himself to them in the sharing of the bread at the table in Emmaus and allowed them to see and understand what eternal life is. The disciples' conversion was also a literal turn from the

■ wrong path of human thoughts and hope, symbolized by their departure from Jerusalem and return to Jerusalem, where they should be.

The light of a new beginning often emerges in the shadow of death and loss. What is actually new is not an attempt to surpass the first creation (πρώτη δημιουργία) but an insight, a glimpse into the excess of the first divine work. We have to go through the experience of suspense and uncertainty and, as Jesus's followers, encounter the reality and mystery of his suffering and death. Our future is in him. Listening to Jesus's teaching and seeing his miracles, our hearts should not become even harder. The devastating power of self-deception can prevent any of us from converting. Moreover, it can make us even more stubborn, blind, and deaf. The Good News is not about our societal position but about (re)positioning ourselves toward God. In our releasement (*Gelassenheit*) toward God, he lets us see (*Sehenlassen*), hear (*Hörenlassen*), and walk together with others σύν-with and ὁδός-way, path). In our journeying together, we are being brought to where we belong: A new heaven and new earth (οὐρανὸν καινὸν καὶ γῆν καινὴν, Rev 21: 1). Our conviction is in the Truth of this promise (ἐπαγγελία).

Through the Cross and Resurrection, our vision is restored, and all our senses made receptive. In the dazzling light, we recognize ourselves as the friends of God (οἱ φίλοι τοῦ Θεοῦ), who made us his friends (ὕμᾱς δὲ εἴρηκα φίλους, J 15: 15), and for us and for our salvation, suffered, died, resurrected, and lives forever.

Χριστός Ανέστη! Αληθώς Ανέστη!