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The Incomprehensible Rationality of Ineffable Divine Logic

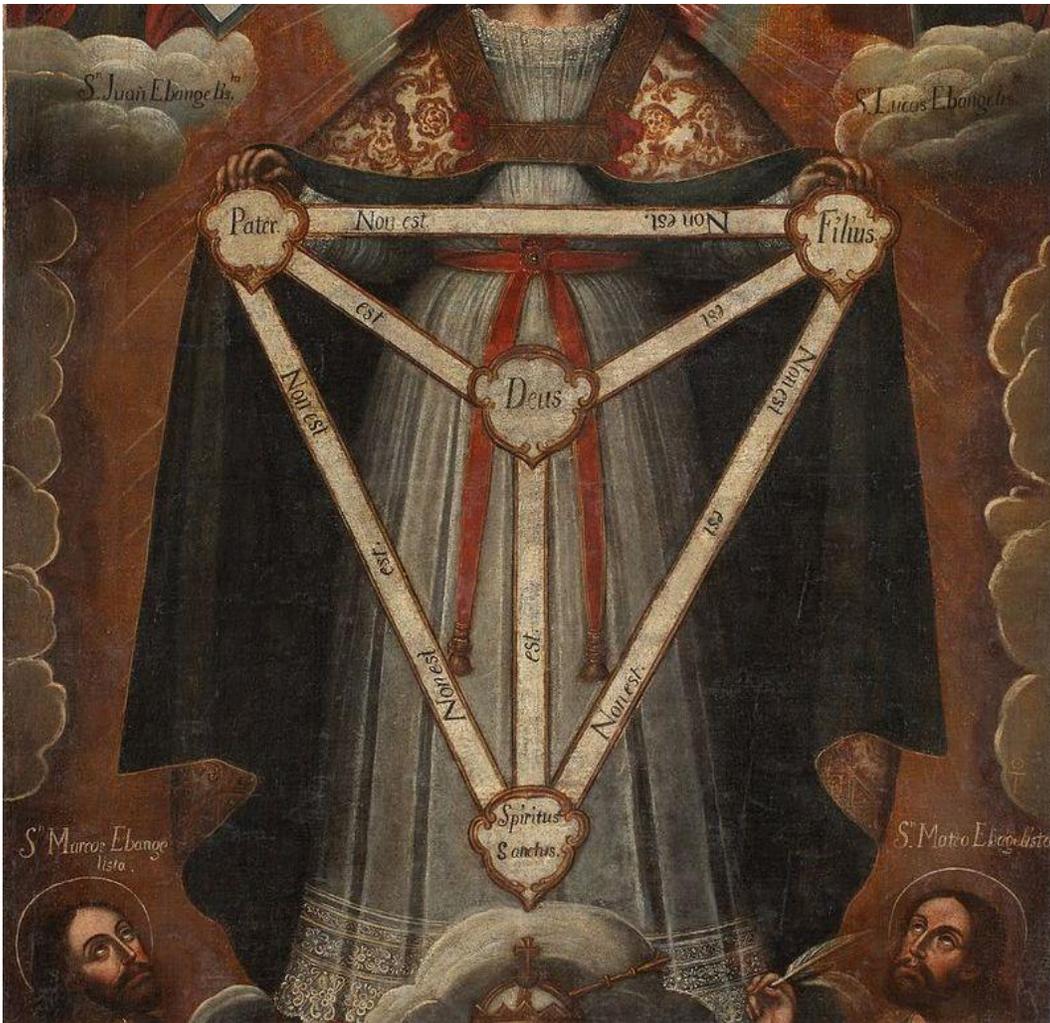
The *Triduum Sacrum* begins with the remembrance of the Last Supper, which is the solemn celebration of Jesus's life and love. While women were busily involved in cooking and serving, as it was customary, the disciples were eating with and listening to Jesus, not fully comprehending the meaning of the "last Supper."

Jacopo Tintoretto, in his late depiction of the Last Supper (Basilica di San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, 1592-1594) powerfully expresses the belonging together of the quotidian and solemn, mundane and extraordinary. What is most remarkable is that the great mysteries of Christian faith are actualized within the confines of everyday culture. Tintoretto's gentle hint that we are dealing not only with a regular meal is the host of angels hovering above the human participants. The painter's genius of tenebrism (*tenebroso*) prevents the picture - full of people and various actions - becoming heavy and distracting, by masterfully playing with light and darkness (*chiaroscuro*) to dramatize the centrality of the Christ's event. The dynamics of the Last Supper engages viewers and calls them to situate themselves within the depicted story. This is also the very center of Jesus's mission: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Mt 11: 28)



The Last Supper is the expression of love: “Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” (J 13: 1) Then, he “took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.” (J 13: 4-5) The washing of the feet of his disciples can be read as a sign of Jesus’s humility and a didactic example for his disciples, to be followed by them. However, this might be much more an expression of love for those who, without fully understanding what was going to happen to their lives, have left everything behind and followed Jesus. Washing their feet was a full articulation of closeness. There is nothing unworthy of being done to your beloved. Provided that the women and other observers were witnessing the washing of the feet of the disciples simply adds the immense importance Jesus put on closeness to him, which is initiated by him and comes from him. The following institution of the Eucharist stresses furthermore not only the physical expression of intimacy with Jesus, but the union with his body and blood which makes us one with him. It is this divine genius of expressing the maximum in the minimum, without sacrificing the fulness of meaning by the humble features of articulation (*Non coerceri maximo, contineri tamen a minimo, divinum est*: not to be limited by the greatest and yet to be contained in the tiniest - that is divine).

There is no real separation from the washing of the feet and the sharing of the body and the blood. It is a matter of the same closeness and intimacy, and a readiness to publicly display emotion when understood as an expression of the unity of being and acting. The bare feet and the bread we touch with our hands disclose something essential about nakedness, which calls for uncovering its meaning. It is a call to discovering the meaning of loss (of clothes, things, and people) and the inseparability of love and anguish. It is a powerful lesson of seeing oneself and the other. This is a matter concerning the cultivation of our senses in order to be able to lose sight of the unimportant and build the genuine capacity of seeing (i.e., this bread is my body). And this capacity is nothing less than the real preparation for faith (*praeambula fidei*) and the expression of it. When St Paul says, “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face” (1 Cor 13: 12), “*per speculum*” refers to God’s incomprehensibility, “*in aenigmate*” to his ineffability. The full sight is seeing face to face in faith.



Meister Eckhart, Interrupting the Silence

On April 18, 1294, a young Dominican theologian from Germany, Eckhart von Hochheim, known as Meister Eckhart, gave a sermon, *Sermo Paschalis*, in the Dominican convent of St Jacques in Paris. This solemn academic sermon, “Pascha nostrum immolatus est Christus: itaque epulemur (2 Cor 5: 7-8), emphasizes that Jesus’s death and resurrection bring new interpretive light and raise it into infinite importance for human life on earth, which thereby receives a hermeneutic insight from unconditional trust in the divine economy of salvation. Thus, human life becomes dwelling in humility and grace. All worldly concerns (*contemptus mundi*) are the condition of the *theatrum mundi*, which has its own logic. Trusting God’s magnificent plan without concentrating overly on the human individual and concrete elements that might not be fitting for the divine architecture is the hermeneutic key to understanding the importance of divine grace and release (*Gelassenheit*) in our personal history of salvation.

Humility (*humilitas*, ταπεινός), as we can learn from Job, does not consist entirely in an elaborate attempt to interpret the meaning of suffering. It is also not a question of deciphering the

divine economy of grace and punishment. Job's genius lays not so much in humbly accepting suffering, but in his ability to listen to God. Job's hermeneutic ear helped him to open his hermeneutic eye to see the mystery of salvation. The answer to Job's suffering comes not from the wise discoveries proffered by his friends but from trusting in the irreplaceability of God. It is God's grace, which illuminates Job's mind and inspires him to say: "Look at me and be astonished; Put your hand over your mouth." Job 21:5

The *Triduum Sacrum* leads us from Gethsemane to an empty tomb, from the cross to resurrection, from slavery to freedom, from death to life. The meaning of Jesus's cross and death is welcoming the logic which is the divine logic: "Not my will but yours be done." (Lk 22:44) It is the recognition of the unattainable, of something that transgresses and transcends the human mind. Furthermore, it is the recognition of rationality, which expresses the divine love. Mary's gentle "let it be done" (γένειτό, *fiat*, Lk 1: 38) and Jesus's loud acclamation "it is accomplished!" (τετέλεσται, *consummatum est*, J 19: 30) show, in different ways of expression, the importance of trust in the divine logic of love. It might be or it will be different from what we might have planned and expected, but the trust in God's plan transgresses every human doubt and uncertainty.

Jesus's cross and resurrection are the birth of new reality, a new creation (ὥστε εἴ τις ἐν Χριστῷ, καινὴ κτίσις, 2 Cor 5: 17, and the Greek text says literally that anyone who *is* in Christ *is* a new creation). It is the beginning of the history of salvation, which is the new history of life, which is immortal. History becomes Life, because it is identified with and personified in Jesus, who is Life (Ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωὴ, J 14:6). From now on, there is no other side of reality; life will be changed, not lost and taken away (*vita mutatur, non tollitur*). The form of life might be changed, but dwelling in, as the mode of being, will be preserved as the immortal dwelling in eternity (*aeterna in caelis habitatio*).

The *Triduum Sacrum*, from the human perspective, is a labyrinth of human ways to God. The resurrection is a reminder that earthly life receives its meaning through the union with God, independently of the circumstances of the individual history. Therefore, the meaning of the Eucharist is the union with Jesus as he is in union with his and our Father. God is sensitive to our human needs. However, we ourselves must recognize and take those needs seriously. It is not just a question of a permanent examining of ourselves (1 Cor 11: 28) but reminding ourselves that we are, and will always be a question for ourselves: "*quaestio mihi factus sum*" (Augustine, *Confessions* 10: 25) And then, like in the scene with the hungry crowds, Jesus might repeat his "you give them food." (Mt 14: 16)



Jacopo Tintoretto, The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes, ca. 1545–50

How could it occur in the reigning of God (βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ) between the “already” and the “not yet”? We do not know, and do not have to know. However, it might happen, like with the miracle of the multiplication of the bread. Our task is to “seek first God’s kingdom and his righteousness.” (Mt 6: 33) The rest might be added. But beware, do not look for the living among the dead. (Lk 24: 5)