

# Just share love!

VILLIAM CONGDON, The temptations of Jesus, 1963

Ash Wednesday

Bose, February 21st, 2007

*Matthew 6:1-6. 16-18*

In the speech on the mountain, a speech given by Jesus for the people of the new Alliance, we listened to some words dealing with prayer, fasting and sharing. It's significant that Jesus confirms the necessity of the prayer, the habit of fasting practiced within Judaism and the kindness of sharing goods with poor people.

Jesus doesn't abolish these actions that he calls justice, which were proclaimed within Judaism and in his community; he confirms them with their great importance even in the disciple's life, of the Christian. But, if we pay careful attention, what emerges as Jesus' great concern is the reason why and how we practice such justice.

Jesus asks us to pray, but also to ask ourselves how and why we pray; he asks us to fast, but he also asks us to go down to the roots of our fasting and ask ourselves about the way we practice it. Because the motivation, that becomes the style of an action, counts as much as the action within the Christian economy. Then, Jesus says not to practice the justice (this is the right term that is translated by the Italic Bible as "good deeds"): don't practice your justice, Jesus says, to be noticed by men, don't practice it in front of them, otherwise you will have already received a reward and you won't receive it from your Father in Heaven. Jesus knows that we can practice justice to receive approval, to be admired, to appear as moral and spiritual guides and teachers; in other words, to earn something in our worldly life and among people.

This is a subtle temptation, much present in religious men because it can actually be justified with good examples, giving evidence. This is the reason why Jesus recalls us to interrogate about the source of our action, he asks us to look just inside our heart, there, where soul and spirit, joint and marrow, feelings and thoughts of the heart are generated, there, where the Word of God can filter as a sharp sword, a double-edged sword.

Therefore, it's important to ask about our motivation: why do I pray? Why do I practice fasting? Why do I give alms? Only if we ask about the root of our behavior, can we also set a value on the action we perform. And therefore, not only the reason why, the root, but also the style in which we perform justice.

Can we pray more in the secrecy of a cell rather than among others and in front of them?

Do we pray because God sees us and we stand in front of Him, or because we stand in front of men?

These are the questions that Lent asks us to consider, aware that hypocrisy is a kind of lie in which we want to involve our aims, for our pay, our earthly reward.

The conviction of hypocrisy is the most frequent reproach of Jesus' teaching, because he knows that it's a spiritual pathology, a whirl; usually we start by putting a mask on, then we pass to pretending and finally we arrive at cunning that cancels the Word of God with our human traditions. Jesus reveals all this in the Gospels. We finish by acting in front of others, with the excuse of the glory of God, to gain approval and applause.

But Jesus warns us: at the end hypocrisy is very ridiculous, because the Father is watching in secrecy, and Jesus seems to ask: why all this acting? Why all this noise? Why trumpet the news if the only thing that counts of praying, fasting and sharing with others is what the Father can see in secrecy and what we do in front of Him and not others?

We could say more, at least Jesus insinuates it to us, regarding the sharing: when you share, your left hand doesn't know what the right one is doing. What is more, avoid sharing so that the others see you, and when sharing don't even measure the action. Only share love, don't ask yourself who the receiver is, don't ask yourself the result and the effectiveness, only in this way can sharing become an act full of love.

Rightly, Saint Paul will say that we can give our goods to poor people without having even a piece of Jesus' *agape* inside us. To have it our actions shouldn't be done on a stage before others, but neither in front of us, because in that case our charity is calculated, it becomes worried, it's an abstracted charity: when giving, only give! An action for love is enough for love, charity is enough for itself, it's not our duty to calculate it, nor others... everything else is hypocrisy.

*Enzo Bianchi*