

(English translation)

Rocca di Papa, 9 October 1978

“The Presence of Jesus in the Christian According to the New Testament” Part III: The Presence of Jesus in the Christian According to St. John

Jesus in the believer

John too, like Paul, has his own way of speaking about the presence of Jesus in the Christian. His characteristic formula is: the believer in Christ, and Christ in the believer. For him, therefore, there is a mutual indwelling.

He speaks about this in connection with the Eucharist: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him" (Jn 6:56).

The word "abide" is consoling because it gives the idea of a mutual immanence that is not momentary, but permanent. Therefore, we are in union with Christ all day long. It is a profound interpenetration which cannot be compared to anything in the human field.

John, concerning this immanence, again gives the very appropriate example of the vine and the branches: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you" (Jn 15:5-7).

John speaks again about this reciprocal immanence in Chapter 17, for example, when he says, "I in them and you in me so that they may become perfectly one" (Jn17:23). John speaks not only about the presence of Christ in the believers but explicitly says that the Trinity itself comes to dwell in the believer.

In the long section of Chapter 14, verses 15-23, the first part (vv. 16-17) deals with the presence of the Holy Spirit in the believer, whose coming is linked to the departure of Jesus, and whose role is to render Jesus present in the believer. Before Jesus' death, in fact, the disciple remained outside of him, so to speak. After the resurrection, through the Holy Spirit, the inner presence of the glorified Christ is realized in the believer. From this comes the new relationship of the believer with Jesus.

This is what John writes: "I will pray the Father, and he will give you another counsellor, to be with you forever, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you" (Jn 14:16).

In the second part (vv. 18-20), John says that the characteristic of the risen Jesus is being with the Father, where through Christ the believer can also be and he too is in a new relationship with the Father: "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.... In that day you will know that I am in the Father, and you in me, and I in you" (Jn 14: 18:20).

In the third part (vv. 21-23), there is the condition demanded by the Risen Jesus which must be fulfilled for him to be present in the believer: faithfulness to his commandments, which has as its effect a greater interior illumination. If this condition is met, the Trinity will make its home in the believer: "He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.... If a man loves, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (Jn 14:21-23).

M. J. Lagrange comments on this moving final verse: "Nothing is demanded by way of intellectual culture, tendency towards contemplation, or some special asceticism. God does not come to provoke ecstasy or some other outward manifestation. He comes to dwell in the soul of the person who loves him. Nothing could be simpler than the expression of this mysticism, and nothing could be more

profound."¹

In his first letter as well as in his Gospel John affirms this mutual indwelling, but instead of speaking of Jesus he speaks of God (see 1 Jn 3:24). The content however, does not change, because the presence of God implies the presence of Christ, and in the first letter John asserts in a unique way that Jesus Christ is God.

Just before this passage in his first letter John has restated and clarified the condition through which God remains in us and we in God: the observance of his commandments, which he sums up in two: to believe in Jesus, and to love one another (see 1 Jn 3:23).

John also says that it is the Spirit who guarantees that God lives in us (see 1 Jn 3:24), the Spirit who inspires in us the confession of faith in Jesus and reciprocal love (see 1 Jn 3:23-24).

At this point we cannot continue without giving special thanks to God. We all know our story; we all know about the choice of the New Commandment, which the first Focolarine made at the outset and which has been made ever since by all those who have been born in this spirit. John explains who it was who moved us to chose that commandment, and who put in our heart such great faith in the Gospel – the Holy Spirit. It was he. Thanks be to him forever.

And at the same time another joyous observation: if we believed and if we loved one another, Christ was in us and we in him. May he keep us like this forever!

Now allow me to conclude this brief in-depth survey of the presence of God (or Christ) in the believer, by turning to the revelation central to Christianity: God is love.

John says that, "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:16) precisely because love, reciprocal love, which presupposes faith, is the condition for remaining in communion with God.

God who is love was the immense sun which illuminated and continues to illuminate all those who meet the Movement. God who is love: our entire Christian life, and that of others, has taken him and will always take him as our starting point.

This splendid verse from the book of Revelation which is also the work of John, shows that God is love and that, as such, he dwells in us. It is delightful.

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20). To eat with Jesus. Yes, when the soul experiences the deep happiness of intimate conversation with God, it has the impression of sharing a meal of love with him.

Chiara Lubich

¹ M. J. Lagrange, "*Evangile selon St. Jean*", 5th ed., Paris 1936, p. 389.