

Clear-Sighted Compassion

John the Baptist's astute sight and sound: 'Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!' (Jn. 1:29) takes my breath away. His vision stops me in my tracks and invites me to yield to Jesus whatever 'sin-sickness' needs His cure. He is masterful: re-entry into His wounds assures me that He will assume my dross while surrounding what is precious. And vulnerable. Repentance always requires healing Presence to fortify and lend form to what is weak but inclined to truth.

Last Sunday's Gospel account met me poignantly, unexpectedly. Before the Lamb, I saw a picture of a car with a minor, almost unseen dent. The danger lay in rust slowly growing and extending its corrosive fingers from the minor injury. I knew what it was. Though familiar, the same new sin, it scared me. I needed to linger in the inner courts of the Lamb, facedown before the cleansing, healing flood still faithfully flowing from His wounds--a fresh washing, and drowning. I needed two things: to die afresh to that corrosion and to resubmit the wound to Him.

To be honest, that hurt my pride. And goaded my impatience. I am sick of this process! So easy to exalt the lifetime plan of becoming chaste—so easy until you hit a bump in it and are thrown off your proud horse, any illusion of having arrived.

I spent a longer time in His Presence than usual and asked what He was doing. Before I could hear, a deep sadness welled up in me, a nearly primal loneliness defined eloquently by Joseph Pieper 'as a truly penetrating knowledge of created things that is associated with an abysmal sadness...which cannot be lifted by any natural force of knowledge or will.'

My first tendency is to renounce such sadness as 'the worldly sorrow that brings forth death' (2 Cor. 7:10). But this was different; God—not His enemy—was surfacing a deep sorrow related to historic disconnectedness. He timed it well, and I could see (my heart tends to 'see' things more than 'hear') His eyes looking at me with deep compassion. That freed me to grieve more deeply, and I recalled the many Gospel passages where Jesus looked at harassed, clueless people and had an immediate, gut-wrenching longing to help them, e.g. compassion (Matt. 9:36; 14:14; 15:22; Mk 6:4; 8:2). He looks at me kindly too.

As I welcomed His consolation where I need it most, many faces of persons I love who also face a similar loneliness came to mind and I could see and weep for them with fresh compassion. I recalled a boy in my neighborhood whom I see often playing by himself; he is being raised by a group of 'intersectional feminists', I presume 'lesbian'-identified, with one 'transitioning'. His family beliefs preclude any bridge to manhood for him. I will advocate for him, starting on my knees: 'Jesus, good shepherd, give me Your eyes and heart with which to see, to feel deeply, to act with compassion for him.'

May we welcome the Lamb of God where we most need Him and allow His compassion to infuse how we love others.

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