THE PASSION
ACCORDING TO SAINT IGNATIUS

Introduction

With this contribution to the Ignatian Course organised by the tirelessly active Ignatian Spirituality Centre, I would like to call attention to some typical Ignatian traits of the Third Week of the Spiritual Exercises.

Ignatius has powerfully built up his structure of the First Week around the genealogy of sin and that of grace. The Second Week contains the essential elements of what is fundamental to Ignatian spirituality. We run the great risk, on the threshold of the Third Week, of neglecting the specific orientation intended by Ignatius and simply taking as starting-point the gospel of the Lord's passion, to give ourselves to the contemplation of the paschal mystery, while ignoring altogether the passion according to St. Ignatius which the Third Week proposes. The danger is all the more real in that, within the spiritual dynamic of the Exercises, the Third Week appears to be just the confirmation of the election, a test of the authenticity of a decision made during the Second Week.

Indeed, a good enough reason seems to indicate that one's prayer during the Third Week be based on the passion according to the evangelists, not on the passion according to St. Ignatius. As a

man of his times, Ignatius makes his retreatant pray on the gospel texts, but without taking into account the specific theology of the evangelist who produced them: he focusses rather on the events as such, as experienced by the Lord on His way to the cross. To be sure, it is in His paschal event that the Lord saved us, not in or through hermeneutics. Nevertheless, is it not more helpful to leave aside the medieval presentation of Ignatius and pray over the paschal mystery in the kerygmatic perspectives of the gospel of Mark, or in the ecclesial context of Matthew's gospel, or with that personal love of the disciple for the Master that marks the Lucan gospel, or with that theological vision of glory of the gospel according to John?

Yet another reason could make us run the risk of falsifying the prayer of the Third Week. In fact, it easily gives rise to meditating on problems closely connected with the Lord's passion: the sense of suffering, the mystery of the cross, the existence of evil, the scandal or the folly of love of a God who suffers, and the passion of Christ as the first act of liberation. True, such problems exist at the heart of our Christian and human existence in every age, and it would be hard to deny the link of these human concerns with the events of the Third Week; but, do they have a place in the spiritual development or dynamics of the Exercises? In any case, such concerns are very far from the goal of the Third Week as defined by Father Gil González Dávila in his Directory of 1587: "to find the heart of Christ amid the turmoils of the passion, and to rouse us to enter into communion with the crucified Christ, that we may declare: 'amor meus crucifixus est' - my love has been crucified" (MI, Directoria Ex. Spir., p. 527). In

sifting through the text of the Third Week, we would like to try to draw from it some particular traits and so to sketch, to the extent possible, the passion of our Lord according to Ignatius.

Ignatius' "a-temporal" approach

How shall we proceed in this our reading of the text of the Exercises? A text is always the result of a series of choices made by the author from among a certain varied number of possibilities. In order to grasp the meaning and import of a text it is absolutely necessary to know these possibilities - some of them accepted by the author, others rejected - from which were originally made the choices incorporated in the text. The better to grasp the typically Ignatian approach to the contemplation of the paschal mystery, the analysis of the text should grapple with the presence or absence in the text of certain possibilities of presenting the passion. Ignatius had the gospel accounts at hand; from among the possibilities of presentation provided by these accounts, he as author of the Spiritual Exercises made some significant choices. The Third Week is the result of these choices, and so constitutes in very truth "the passion according to St. Ignatius".

And so, to come to the heart of the matter, the reader will at once notice that Ignatius does not preserve in his text any of the indications of time that punctuate the gospel accounts. There is no mention of "when it was evening" (Mt 26,20) in connection with the Last Supper, or of the night of Peter's denial (Mk 14,30), or of the day of the sabbath (Lk 23,54), no word at all about the sixth

or the ninth hour (Lk 23,44). Just one exception, which therefore attracts all our attention: "Jesus remained bound the whole night" (292)*. And here, it is rather the duration of the Lord's painful endurance than a simple indication of time. The time as such is not important except in the measure in which it contributes to the passion of Christ. As usual, Ignatius arranges the days and the hours of prayer of the one who is making the Exercises, but the passion itself takes place outside any chronological framework in the eternal present, the today, of God.

The "way" or journey of the Third Week

This "a-temporal" aspect, however, does by no means give to the passion a static character of immobility. Prayer here does no longer, as it did in the Second Week, move from the contemplation of one mystery of the life of Christ to another. Ignatius explicitly insists on the retreatant's journeying along the "mysteries" as on a route: "from the Last Supper to the Garden" (290), "from the Garden to the house of Annas" (291), "from the house of Pilate to the Cross" (296). Starting from the Last Supper (289) right up to the mysteries accomplished "from the cross to the sepulchre" (298) the connecting links indicate a path to be traversed - a path including one or other of the mysteries, at the end including all the mysteries together (209), yet remaining always the passion, the paschal journey of the Lord.

* When not otherwise indicated, the numbers within rounded brackets refer to the numbers of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius.

As already remarked by Ignatius in the Second Week (116), this paschal journey does not begin with the Last Supper, but at the moment of the Lord's birth: "from the time of His birth down to the mystery of the passion upon which I am engaged at present" (206). If then the absence of the indications of time places us within the eternal present of the paschal mystery, the connecting-link indications put us on a journey, on a way of the cross which begins in the birth of Him who is the Way. Every stage of this Way is a mystery for the one who desires "to know better the eternal Word Incarnate" (130), right up to the point where these stages succeed one another with such intensity that, as mysteries, they give way to the totality of the passion of "the great sorrow and suffering of Christ our Lord" (206). This way or path of "labours, fatigue and suffering" is, in the last analysis, the person of Christ our Lord who endured them (206).

The "kenotic" change in the name

This way or journey works a profound transformation in the person of Christ, and Ignatius appears to call attention to this fact even in the very name of the Lord. The use of the title "Christ our Lord", at times in the abridged forms of "Christ" or "the Lord", largely dominates the whole of the Second Week. Again, on the threshold of the Third Week, it is "Christ our Lord" who celebrates the Last Supper (191). Indeed, Ignatius explicitly points to the contrast between "the majesty of the Lord" and the "lowliness of Peter" during the mysteries of this Last Supper (289). Once again, it

is "Christ our Lord" (201; cf. "the Lord" - 290, 291 - and "Christ" - 201) who lives the mystery of the garden and works the conversion of Peter after his denial (292), but thereafter "the divinity hides itself" (196). There is in the use of the titles a certain tendency to efface the majesty of Christ before "the most sacred humanity" (196), which is given the name of "Jesus the Galilean" (294) and "Jesus the Nazarene" (296) until that moment when the title of "Christ our Lord" is once again taken up in the mystery of the resurrection (299).

This "kenotic" or self-emptying change in the name - not that it should be taken as absolute, for we are talking, as we have said, of a certain tendency in the use of the name - is confirmed by the same kind of tendency in the Second Week's use of the name of Jesus: there it is reserved, at times in such abbreviated forms as "the child Jesus" or "the child" or "Jesus", for the kenosis or self-emptying involved in the childhood of the Word of God. It is true that on the cross the Lord is without a name, designated simply by the pronoun "He" (297, 298); but this linguistic fact should not be interpreted as indicating the complete effacement of Christ, for the same thing can be seen also in the other Weeks (cf. "He appeared" - 299).

From the "creative activity" of the Second Week to the "suffering passivity" of the Third Week

Of greater importance is the movement in the person of Christ from His creative activity, that the Second Week pulsates with, to His passivity - undergoing pain and suffering - that characterises

the Third Week. The sixteen mysteries of the public life of Christ (273-288), indicated by Ignatius for the prayer of the Second Week, manifest the glory of God: five mysteries to reveal the Son of God; five mysteries to highlight in miraculous fashion His divine activity; two mysteries speak of the Lord's power over sin; two mysteries are connected with His teaching, and two with the call of the apostles to follow Christ. What shines forth is the icon of the Pantocrator along whose path "sufferings" are scarcely present; the passion is never announced, and it is only in the very last mystery of the Second Week that a certain opposition to Jesus comes to light: "since there was no one in Jerusalem who would receive Him" (288). But the Third Week, after the mystery of the agony in the garden, marks a sharp change of perspective: a feverish activity prevails all around Jesus along the path leading to the cross, but this "meek Lord" (291), in the text of Ignatius, remains right up to the resurrection either the grammatical subject of a passive verb - "He is led to Annas" (291) - or more frequently the grammatical object of an active verb - "Pilate led Him forth before all" (295). It is the others who are active in tracing inexorably the way that leads to the cross. The Lord "allows Himself to be kissed by Judas" (291) just as the divinity "leaves the most sacred humanity to suffer so cruelly" (196). There is, however, one exception in the text of the "mysteries": "He carried the cross upon His shoulders", but this activity does not last: "when He was no longer able to do so..." (296).

The choice made by Ignatius of the mysteries for the Second Week and his very manner of presenting the mysteries for the Third Week indicate as

Way the glory of the Pantocrator and the affliction of the Suffering Servant. The "fifth point" of the first day of the Third Week (196) translates into words the reality that Ignatius has effected by his choice of the mysteries of the life of Christ: the divinity reveals itself in freely hiding itself in the cruelly suffering humanity. The Pantocrator is the Suffering Servant. Ignatius stresses even more that the divine omnipotence reveals itself in the human powerlessness by the choice he makes of the gospel material. The Christ of the gospels is more active during His passion than the Christ of the Third Week. True, He is dragged to the slaughter-house (Is 53,7), but He never stops protesting either by word or by His silence against the injustice inflicted on Him. In the mysteries of the Third Week Jesus keeps absolutely silent from the house of Caiphas (292) right up to the cross on which "He spoke seven words" (297). The final cry of protest in Mt 27,46 - "my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" - is toned down by Ignatius to: "He said that He was forsaken" (297). All initiative in deed and word belongs to His enemies whom "the divinity... could destroy... and does not do so" (196). The perspective of the Ignatian contemplation of the passion is clearly that Jesus "does not do" (196) and "answers nothing" (294). It is this Jesus not responding to the questions asked (294), as well as His not reacting to the provocations of His accusers, that Ignatius has somehow plastically concretised in the "slap" repeatedly given Him in the face: a "slap" in the house of Annas (291), again in the house of Caiphas (292), and once more in the house of Pilate (295).

In the gospels Christ protests, and in this reveals Himself as Son of God and King; but in the

Third Week Christ does not react in any way. And yet, if the almighty power of God hides itself in the powerlessness of Jesus, it only "seemed to hide itself during the passion" (233), for it really reveals itself in the divine gift and pardon of the "meek Lord" (291) on the cross - Jesus is completely at home in his own "house" - where His glory bursts forth in pardoning the thief and handing Himself over to His Father (297).

This insistence of the Third Week on the divine powerlessness scarcely differs from that of the Second Week's mysteries of the infancy. Both the human powerlessness taken up in the mysteries of the infancy as well as the human powerlessness freely submitted to in the mysteries of the passion are the "kenosis" or self-emptying of the Lord. Hence the reference to the cross in the mystery of the birth: "making the journey and labouring that the Lord might be born in extreme poverty, and that after many labours, after hunger, thirst, heat, and cold, after insults and outrages, He might die on the cross..." (116). This text already contains the powerlessness in which the All-Powerful journeys from the time of His birth.

Powerlessness: a passivity of "positive desire"

Though insistent here on the mystery of powerlessness, Ignatius does by no means consider it as purely negative. The three special or typical points of the first day of the Third Week, which contain the entire Ignatian theology of the passion, reflect a decisively positive understanding of this powerlessness. In the fourth point (195)

Christ not only suffers in His human nature, but He "desires to suffer". In the fifth point (196) it is the divinity which has all the initiative as it "leaves the most sacred humanity to suffer so cruelly". And in the sixth point (197) Ignatius offers the sole response sketched by the New Testament, in the light of Is 53, to our question: why suffering, any suffering? He says: "Christ suffers all this"... for us, for me, "for my sins". Ignatius presents the gospel account of the passion as a paschal journey of mysteries which all proclaim, in the last analysis, that the path of the "magis" is that of the "minus" - "to be accounted as worthless and a fool for Christ" (167) - for it is in the powerlessness of the "kenosis" that the glory of the All-Powerful is revealed to us. The why of the paschal mystery and the meaning of the cross are like the book of seven seals mentioned in the Apocalypse: only the Lamb that was slain is able to open it for us - "how it is that though He is the Creator, He has stooped to become man, and to pass from eternal life to death here in time, that thus He might die for our sins" (53).

Finally it is not just some past historical event or even a theology that I am here confronted with; rather, I come face to face with the person of Christ on His paschal journey here and now. It is up to me, then, inspired by Christ "hanging on the cross", to "ponder" (53) - that is, to enter ever more deeply, through a heart-to-heart encounter with Him, into the paschal mystery. If this first meditation of the First Week makes the retreatant ask: "what ought I to do for Christ?" (53), the Third Week goes further: "what I ought to do and suffer for Him" (197). The encounter with Christ would not be authentic without "sorrow with

Christ in sorrow, anguish with Christ in anguish ..." (203); it would be spurious and warped if it did not "call to mind the labours, fatigue and suffering which Christ our Lord endured" (206) as the consequences of his desire (195), as something borne "for my sins" (197), as a creative act of the divinity who is love (196, and "how much, as far as He can, the same Lord desires to give Himself to me according to his divine decrees" - 234).

Love alone explains all

Perhaps it is Origen who puts into words what Ignatius does not want to formulate explicitly, so that we can discover it for ourselves in the encounter and colloquy with Christ on His paschal journey. In his sixth homily on Ezechiel (5,6), Origen writes: "If He came down to earth, it is out of compassion for the human race (cf. here 107: 'let us work the redemption of the human race'). Yes, He bore our sufferings even before having experienced the sufferings of the cross, indeed before having taken on Himself our fleshly nature. For, had he not suffered, He would not have come to share with us our human life. First He suffered, then He came down among us (cf. here 102: 'since They see that all are going down to hell, They decree in Their eternity that the Second Person should become man to save the human race'). But what is this passion which He experienced for us? The passion of love (cf. here 338: 'the love that... comes down from above')". So if God suffers, it is because of His boundless love from the beginning; it is because He remains faithful to His love for us, even when this love entails the

sufferings of His only Son. This reference to the love from above and from the beginning impels us to commit ourselves to it, and so it becomes and remains a confession of faith. Eastern Christianity is very fond of alluding, with Nicholas Cabasilas, to this "mad love of God for man which does not simply destroy evil and death, but assumes them"; yet it does not look upon this confession of faith as the philosophical solution to the problem of suffering.

For this reason Ignatius does not insist on the suffering, but on Christ who suffers (195). Jesus never stopped combating suffering which He always considered as an evil (Mt 26,23-24), and which He experienced in Himself with such anguish that in the garden "His garments were saturated with blood" (290). It is not so much suffering that draws us close to Christ, as Christ our Lord who in His suffering and scandalous death on the cross draws near to our sufferings and afflictions as human beings. If Ignatius then feels obliged to invite us to "begin with great effort to strive to grieve, to be sad, and to weep" (195 and 206), he does not intend some sort of voluntaristic promethean effort regarding the suffering to be experienced, nor is he aiming at adding to the passion of Christ a new and further engendering of sorrow and sadness. Ignatius gives as example the Mother of the Child Jesus who felt compassion for her Son because of the blood He shed in His circumcision (266). For this compassion to be genuine, great effort is required, as Ignatius says, because the passion of the Lord - that is, to suffer as he suffered - is not connatural to the human person. If, indeed, suffering in its radical absurdity impels the human person to run away from it or to resign

oneself to it as inevitable, to take suffering upon oneself as Christ did is, and remaine, folly and a scandal.

Faithful to the gospel of the passion, Ignatius neve sacralises suffering or misfortune, but he proposes a compassion that sanctifies all suffering. The difference is based on that love which alone justifies as much Christ's desire to suffer (195), as the paschal event of His divinity leaving the most sacred humanity to suffer so cruelly (196), as also His suffering for my sins (197). The word "love", which is the sole response to all the challenging questions of the Third Week, appears expressly in this Week only in the mystery of the Last Supper, when the Lord institutes "the most holy sacrifice of the Eucharist as the greatest proof of his love" (289); but it is love which alone warrants and elicits our compassion (cf. 197: "what I ought to do and suffer for him").

"Compassion" means love

The term "compassion" can be risky and ambiguous in a context without "love", signifying then pure sentimentality, a sort of comforting pity in which man consoles even his own self over so much misfortune and misery. Ignatius does not attempt in any way to make this compassion aesthetically tolerable for us by means of some happy turn of phrase - like that of Philarète, metropolitan of Moscow (19th century), who said: "God triumphs over suffering by passing through suffering", or that of the poet Paul Claudel, who wrote: "God did not come to explain suffering, He came to fill it with His presence". The Third Week has a rich vocabu-

lary of words to denote suffering. No aspect or element of suffering is glossed over. But suffering is always secondary in relation to the One who suffers, that is, Christ (203 and 206: "which Christ our Lord endures - or has endured - for me"), and always secondary in relation to the folly of love which, according to Ignatius, is revealed in the painful powerlessness of the All-Powerful One. There can, therefore, be no compassion without suffering, but suffering freely taken on by a love that seeks effective resemblance to Christ in wanting to be "poor" and "accounted as ... fool" for His glory (167), and not some carbon-copy imitation of the passion of Christ.

This compassion calls for an "eternal Third Week", according to the expression of Father Fessard, because in his inmost self - indeed in his very suffering - man seeks to fulfil himself. The Last Supper, on which Ignatius insists as a sort of foundation for the Third Week, entails a veritable trans-substantiation of myself in which the old Adam dies to rise to the new Adam in the image and likeness of the majesty of the Lord at the feet of man in His existential "lowliness", in order to make this latter rise to new life as "Paschal Lamb" (289). The vocabulary of Ignatius, which carries a strong affective charge - sorrow, tears, sufferings, anguish, affliction, sadness - and which insists on "sorrow with Christ in sorrow" (203), is a call to enter into the paschal mystery - that paschal mystery which is based on the kenosis or self-emptying of the Word of God, of which Christ's sufferings on the sense-level are but painful expressions - so that we may complete by our personal kenosis what is still wanting to the passion of Christ (Col 1,24).

Conclusion

The essence of the gospel, that is of the good news, is the paschal mystery. All that goes before it is only an introduction to and preparation for it. Should we not, perhaps, say the same of the Third Week of the Exercises? Without the First Week, the acknowledgment that the Lord suffers for my sins lacks personal depth. Without the Second Week, the desire to be chosen to suffer with Christ in suffering lacks the concretisation of a personal plan and decision. However, it is only in the Third Week, founded on the Eucharist that is Christ's Passover, that the sin which links me personally to the enemies that his "divinity could destroy and does not do so" (196) impels me to a true love-encounter with Christ as he effects his Passover in and with us. Again, it is only in the Third Week that all that has been desired and imagined in the form of concrete life-plans and projects becomes paschal reality when His Divine Majesty places us with His crucified Son.

In this way, far from being a kind of sentimental expression of our attachment to Christ, far too from being a simple confirmation of a real but still imaginary desire of following Christ, the Third Week - no differently from the paschal mystery which this Third Week celebrates - constitutes a personalisation within me of the Lord crucified and risen, of the Lamb slain and alive, seeing that I have personally acknowledged my being a sinner and personally responded to the call to follow Christ according to the Three Kinds of Humility. In biblical language, heart speaks to heart. Then sadness no longer concentrates on one's sins, then creative joy no longer takes the shape of ge-

nerous plans and projects - my generous plans and projects. It is Passover, the exodus from one's own narrow self, to be sad and to rejoice with and for the Wholly Other as He is scoffed at, struck, humiliated in that one and only experience of power - His paschal might and power.

And so, the prayer of the Third Week cannot but be disinterested, ready to receive humbly and freely from the God of Jesus Christ my cross - to carry his own cross; ready to receive my Passover of the offensive of humble love between God and man: to become, for the paschal glory of God, a fool for God. The passion according to St. Ignatius expresses the powerful love of the Lord who saved others in and through His powerlessness, incapable as He was of saving Himself (Mk 15,31). It challenges us to receive, in an act of paschal gratitude, the humility and humilation of the Lord, for only a heart poor in spirit can make men rich with the richness of the Life of God.