

Meekness

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I. The Actual Situation

The experience of meekness is discovered in our experience of peace. Throughout history peace has always demanded great effort, yet the results of these efforts have been very limited. John Paul II, in his Message on the occasion of the celebration of the World Day of Peace in 2005 stated that: *peace is the outcome of a long and demanding battle which is only won when evil is defeated by good* ("Message for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace," 1 January 2005, No. 1). The panorama is dramatic: confrontations, fratricides, incredible suffering and injustice. There is only one option: to detest the horrors of evil and to cling to that which is good. *Peace is a good for individuals, for families, for nations and for all humanity* (Message, No. 1). Evil passes for human freedom and has a face and a concrete name: men and women who freely choose it. *Evil is a tragic rejection of the demands of love. Moral good, on the other hand, is born of love shows itself as love and is directed toward love* (Message, No. 2). This idea is beautifully expressed by St. Paul in his letter to the Romans, a passage that inspired the Pope's message: *If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink... do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good* (Rom 12:20-21). Evil is not overcome by evil. Those who act in this way, allow themselves to be overcome by evil. The Pope notes that *the human family urgently needs to preserve and esteem that common patrimony of moral values bestowed by God himself... and ever greater commitment and responsibility in ensuring that the life of individuals and peoples is respected and advanced* (Message, Nos. 3 and 4). The common good has a transcendent dimension because God is the ultimate end of humankind. We are a human family and are *citizens of the world* (Message, No. 6). We are all responsible for the common good, but political authorities and the international community, each one at its own level, have a special responsibility to confront the evils that thwart the establishment of peace.

Pope John Paul II exhorts us to cultivate this *invincible hope* that is proper to Christians and *sustains their efforts to promote justice and peace* (Message, No. 11). *Love is the only force capable of bringing fulfillment to persons and societies, the only force capable of directing*

the course of history in the way of goodness and peace (Message, No. 12). Despite the fact that he was not listened to, Pope John Paul II, up until the time of his death, always shouted out: *No more war that kills our sisters and brothers!* It is the same cry as that of Christ who died on the cross: the triumph of Love that gives life. We continue to make war that ultimately kills ourselves because we do not know what we are doing and because we do not truly believe in Jesus Christ. We do not allow Jesus to enter our hearts and to give us the light and the strength to sweep out the rubbish of selfishness and violence that we carry within ourselves. This trash obscures not only the panorama of our external world but also the beautiful panorama of the Kingdom of God which, day by day, can become more deeply rooted in our hearts if we allow ourselves to be enlightened and freed by Jesus Christ.

II. Vincent de Paul's vision of meekness

Fr. Robert Maloney, after presenting St. Vincent's doctrine on meekness in his study of our five characteristic virtues, reminds us that the fundamental motive for living meekness is the example of Jesus Christ and the power of his saving love. Jesus is not only the model of meekness, but he is also the loving Savior for each one of us. For St. Vincent the virtue of meekness is intimately connected to the love of Jesus who desires to save us. Jesus' gift of salvation, on a personal level as well as an ecclesial level, is an heroic, progressive and slow process. The existence of evil in us and in the world, as well as the awareness of its historical roots — all this helps us to understand our need for Jesus Christ who became the history of salvation by becoming man, dying on the cross and rising to new life. Jesus did all this because he loved us. In the midst of our daily struggles, we need to listen, again and again, to Jesus' invitation: *Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest. For my yoke is easy and my burden light* (Mt 11:28-30).

The practical wisdom of St. Vincent with regard to meekness, a wisdom learned from Jesus Christ, is beautifully presented by Fr. Maloney in four important forms for today:

- a) Meekness entails the ability to handle anger positively;
- b) Meekness implies approachability and gentleness, especially important qualities in ministers;
- c) Meekness involves the ability to endure offenses with forgiveness and courage;
- d) Meekness should be seen as a way to build peace. This is especially true today when we are called to give witness to Jesus' gentleness, to proclaim the Kingdom of Peace,

to educate for peace and to promote justice and development (cf. ROBERT P. MALONEY, C.M., *The Way of Saint Vincent de Paul* [New City Press: Brooklyn, New York, 1992], pp. 60-61).

These four forms imply and provide a basis of unity for each person who attempts to live this virtue of meekness. They also provide a basis for our union with the person of Jesus Christ, the root and source of authentic Christian and Vincentian meekness.

I believe it is useful to study Jesus' meekness, that is, his meekness as it is revealed in some of the Biblical passages. In this study I will refer to some of the studies of Augusto Jorge Cury, scientist, researcher, sociologist-psychiatrist, who has undertaken a wonderful initiative to study, in a scientific way, the intelligence, emotional life, and in general, the life and the love of Jesus Christ. These are very helpful human efforts that assist us in our personal journey with Jesus Christ. Jesus continues to teach us today how to live this meekness in a concrete way.

III. Jesus' meekness and ours

The general attitude of Jesus toward his disciples, the Jewish community and today, his attitude toward us, is that of the sower: he plants seeds in the mind and heart. Jesus realizes that these seeds will take time to grow: seeds of freedom and responsibility, seeds that enable us to soften our anger, envy, hatred, fear and pride. Little by little we come to a greater knowledge of ourselves, we realize our limitations and we are able to lift ourselves up and begin again. We learn not to depend on what others do or think about us. Before the proud, rigid, moralistic Jewish authorities, Jesus presented himself with simplicity, with no airs about him, a close friend of the poor, sinners, prostitutes and those living on the margins of society. At the same time Jesus was admired for his teaching, his works and miracles. He was not afraid to say what he thought about the Pharisees nor was he afraid to criticize the leaders of the people. He disturbed the learned with his wise answers. Some admired him but the majority of people viewed Jesus as an enemy and wanted to kill him. Jesus was not afraid of death, rather he walked toward death, encouraged by the Father's love and the love of humankind. Jesus explained to the people his thinking and encouraged them to think and act rightly in their lives. Above all, Jesus unconditionally loved and pardoned others.

Jesus taught people to think before acting. The Pharisees presented to him a woman caught in the act of adultery. They asked Jesus: *Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such a woman. So what do you say?* (Jn 8:5). Jesus remained silent and wrote on the

ground. The Pharisees were insistent and wanted an answer. So Jesus responded: *let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her* (Jn 8:9). He continued to write on the ground. The Pharisees left, one by one, beginning with the eldest. Jesus then asked the woman: *Has no one condemned you? No one sir. Then Jesus said: neither do I condemn you. Go [and] from now on do not sin any more* (Jn 8:10-11). Jesus taught his disciples and the Pharisees to free themselves from prejudice and violence and to learn to walk according to the interior movements of their hearts and to recognize their own faults: *remove the wooden beam from your eye first, then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother's eye* (Mt 7:5). The Pharisees listened and embraced Jesus' wisdom: they dropped the stones and left. Jesus' meekness toward the woman caught in adultery is clear: *has no one condemned you?* (Jn 8:10); then rise up, for you have great value. Thus peace was established in the hearts of the Pharisees and the woman and peace was also established between the different individuals involved in this event.

The cleansing of the Temple

The Jewish Passover was drawing near. Jesus found people selling oxen, sheep and pigeons in the temple, as well as others changing coins. He made a whip of cords and drove everyone from the Temple, as well as the sheep and oxen. He knocked over the tables of the money changers, spilling their coins (cf. Jn 2:13-15). He told those who were selling doves: *get them out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market place* (Jn 2:16). The Jews responded: *what sign can you show us authorizing you to do these things?* (Jn 2:18). Jesus told them: *destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up... actually he was talking about the temple of his body* (Jn 2:19-21). Jesus took possession of his Father's Temple and expelled those sellers who had profaned the Temple. Jesus revealed his plans: the physical Temple that had been built some time ago, is now transferred into Jesus' interior: *destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up* (Jn 2:19). Through his death and resurrection, Jesus opened the way so that every person thereafter could become the new temple of God. The architect of the universe of billions of galaxies became so small that he came and dwelt among us as a human person, a lowly human creature. This was Jesus' dream. He began it and we are called to make it a reality in ourselves and in others. Yet we still cultivate discrimination, selfishness and business as usual more than love.

This is the only time that Jesus expressed his anger in this way. His anger was not directed against people but against the behavior and the disrespect that was shown to his Father's house. He was not afraid to speak the truth even though he would have to die for the

truth. Jesus fulfilled the thinking of Aristotle: *it is difficult to be angry at the right moment, for the right motive and in the right way.*¹ We need to learn from Jesus how to cleanse the temple of our interior, the Father's house, the Church of sisters and brothers who come together in prayer and love: to turn over the tables of our negative thinking, to root out the fear and anxiety, to examine our rigidity and view the superficiality with which we react to the events of life. We are the new People of God, reconciled by the death of Jesus.

Jesus at the Last Supper

Jesus said: *I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer* (Lk 22:15). Jesus had planned to die during the Passover. Others had attempted to kill him before, but *his hour* had not arrived. This was the high point in his mission, a moment he had eagerly desired. The disciples were unable to understand this secret of eternity. Jesus washed their feet and thus established a new form of human relations. This was an expression of tolerance, a form of acceptance of another and a form of sharing love by washing the uncleanness from another person. People become more mature as they become more tolerant and less rigid in their judgments of others. Jesus also washed the encrusted dirt from the feet of Judas, the traitor. Then Jesus took the bread, gave thanks to the Father, and said: *take and eat this is my body... this is my blood... which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins* (Mt 26:26-28). In this way Jesus gave a meaning to his sacrifice and death which would occur the following day.

Jesus *gave thanks* (Mt 26:27) to the Father: the Father was his interior world, his life, his love, his strength. Then he looked at his disciples, one by one, including his enemies, and gave them the love that he himself had received from the Father, namely, his Body and Blood, a gift that went beyond the limits of material reality. Jesus offered his life and his blood to the Father as instruments of justice and forgiveness of the human person. Jesus was asked to shed his blood in order to justify us before the Father.

Freud and psychologists understand the terrible weight of recalling negative realities of life and history, realities that are part of one's unconsciousness. How many years of effort are needed, on the part of both psychologist and patient, to heal the psyche and enable one to deal with human life! Yet Jesus said to his disciples: *whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day* (Jn 6:54). These are unexpected and surprising words. Never before had someone planned something like this: to use

¹ Translator's Note: I do not know the source of this reference.

death in order to heal the world of its miseries and thus elevate human life to a level of eternal life. We are often filled with sadness because of small, inconsequential sufferings. Jesus walked toward death and promised his disciples immortality. He celebrated a supper with joy, eagerness, and a desire to live and give his life. He excluded no one from the banquet, not even Judas. Jesus did not allow himself to be disturbed by the offenses and weaknesses of those around him. Jesus lived the present moment with great intensity. Thus *after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives* (Mk 14:26).

We make our emotional life a garbage dump: any offense against our person is stored up in our memory and we allow these offenses to disturb us for extended periods of time. We need to learn from Jesus how to live the present moment with great intensity and not waste our energy on negative realities. We need to learn how to live the beautiful and difficult moments of our daily life with joy and a sense of community. We need to learn to live with an openness to the One who is beyond our hope and imagination: the Father.

Jesus' words of farewell

John transmits these words to us and we must remember that John was a privileged witness who never forgot these words that he wrote much later. The intimate, close and gentle environment of Jesus with his disciples was most impressive. *As I have loved you, so you also should love one another* (Jn 13:34). This is a love that destroys the seeds of individualism and cuts the roots of loneliness. *In my Father's house there are many dwelling places... and I go there to prepare a place for you... so that where I am you also may be* (Jn 14:2-4). He prayed to the Father for his disciples. He expressed the depths of his being and his most intimate feelings. He prayed so that his disciples would not be sad, depressed or anxious, but rather so their *joy may be complete* (Jn 15:11). *I pray that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you* (Jn 17:21). Jesus wanted his disciples to learn to walk in the way of love. These were times when love was not spoken about — times in which power, dominion and selfishness were dominant.

Jesus foresees the errors of his disciples

Jesus foresaw that Judas would betray him and that Peter would deny him and that all would abandon him. Jesus communicated this to his disciples but we might ask: why?

1. To relieve their own sorrow for their faults. He wanted to give them an emotional defense for their frustration. Jesus loved and offered himself for humankind, but

he knew that people are weak and therefore, he could not expect much from them.

2. Jesus not only foresaw their failures but publicly told the disciples about this. He did this not to humiliate or discourage them, but to prepare them to continue their own journey. He wanted to show them that he demanded nothing of them. He taught them to overcome their fear, conquer their anxiety and work through the pains and failures in life.
3. He wanted to point out to them that they did not know themselves and needed to mature and recognize their weaknesses in stressful situations, stresses that prevented them from thinking clearly, stresses that impelled them to act erroneously. Jesus used these mistakes of his disciples to lead them to a greater knowledge of themselves and make them responsible for their own lives. He never abandoned them, even though they abandoned him.
4. Jesus wanted to prepare them so that they would not hate themselves when they fell. He did not want them to be overcome by feelings of guilt and discouragement. Jesus knew that they would suffer greatly when they fell. He wanted to protect and educate them so that they would rise up and grow in wisdom and love. He taught them the art of thinking even though it might be at the cost of terrible mistakes.

The sufferings of Jesus caused by his disciples

1. The Teacher is not helped by his disciples when he asks for help

When they arrived at the Mount of Olives, Jesus said to his disciples: *pray that you may not undergo the test* (Lk 22:40). Then *he took along Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to feel sorrow and distress. Then he said to them, my soul is sorrowful even to death. Remain here and keep watch with me. He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will"* (Mt 26:37-39). He returned to his disciples and found them asleep. He spoke to Peter: *So you could not keep watch with me for one hour? Watch and pray that you may not undergo the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. Withdrawing a second time, he prayed again* (Mt 26:40-42).

Jesus trusted his friends and communicated to them his sadness at the thought of death. They never thought that he would need their help and companionship. This fact caused them greater stress and they fell asleep. The doctor, Luke, noted that even though the disciples were strong men, nevertheless Jesus *found them sleeping*

from grief (Lk 22:45). Jesus separated himself from the disciples because he needed to pray to his Father and prepare himself for the impending suffering that would befall him that very night. Despite Jesus' tension and anxiety he did not become irritated with his disciples. He simply invited them to pray to the Father so that they might be strong in the situation of pain that life would bring them. He also confidently asked them for help.

2. Judas' betrayal

Jesus prayed and awaited the moment of his arrest. When *the hour* arrived, he awoke his disciples: *Behold the hour is at hand... Look, my betrayer is at hand* (Mt 26:45-46). Many soldiers arrived, but what most pained Jesus was the fact that *Judas his betrayer was also with them* (Jn 18:5). This was more painful to him than the blows of the soldiers. Yet even here Jesus protected Judas. He had shared his life with the traitor and never excluded him. Judas gave him the traitor's kiss and Jesus called him, *friend* (Mt 26:50) to encourage him to reflect on his attitude. Jesus loved Judas to the end. Jesus' primary commitment was with his own conscience, and not with the consciences of others, even though he loved them all. This was the powerful teaching that Jesus shared with his disciples, but Judas did not learn the lesson.

3. All abandoned him

Jesus had announced this abandonment: *I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be dispersed* (Mk 14:27). The disciples were attracted to Jesus and trusted in his power. They fought among themselves to obtain the first place in his kingdom. It is easy to support the powerful person, but glory and power are traps. Jesus taught them that life, the human person, love, and conscience are more important than power and appearances. Jesus criticized the attitude of the Pharisees, namely their attitude of wanting to look good in the eyes of others, and pointed out to them that interior attitudes of the heart and mind are more important. The disciples would learn this lesson.

4. Peter denies Jesus

Peter had a strong personality. His encounter with Jesus was the highlight of his life. He left everything to follow him because *even the winds and the sea obey him* (Mt 8:27). But when Jesus' power was stripped away, Peter's strength disappeared. He took out his sword and very courageously defended Jesus. He cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest and it was only because of the quick intervention of Jesus that more injuries did not occur. He secretly followed Jesus to the house of the High Priest and observed the humiliations and blows that were inflicted on Jesus. He could not believe the violence of these individuals or the passivity of the

Teacher before these aggressors. He had witnessed Jesus' courage, wisdom and power when confronted by his enemies but had no knowledge of this other courage that human beings possess: the courage to confront pain, disparagement and public humiliation in silence. Peter was filled with fear of being associated with someone who was so violently attacked and humiliated. He could not think and so again and again he denied Jesus. For a moment Jesus became a source of embarrassment to Peter. This triple denial of Peter caused Jesus more pain than the blows and spittle of the soldiers. Peter denied all that he had lived with Jesus. When Peter denied Jesus a third time, Jesus turned toward him with a captivating glance and removed Peter's fear and enabled him to reflect on what was occurring. Peter remembered that he had promised his Teacher that he would die for him (cf. Jn 13:37) and that Jesus had told him that he would deny him (cf. Jn 13:38). Peter left discouraged for he had never betrayed his word in such a shameful way. But Jesus looked at him in a way that was not condemning but encouraging — encouraging him not to condemn himself but to believe in love and humbly recognize his limitations so that he could overcome these limitations. Peter cried as never before and he became stronger as a result of his fall: stronger in his ability to forgive, stronger in his ability to understand human frailty and stronger in his ability to give another chance to those who fall. Persons who are very rigid and critical of others are those who have the least knowledge of their own person. Jesus, the Teacher of Life, chained and humiliated, encouraged his disciples with a look of love, encouraged his disciples not to allow themselves to be overcome with their failures — he was suffering there precisely for that reason.

The Jewish trial of Jesus

1. The social motives for which Jesus was tried by the Jews

Jesus' behavior toward the Pharisees, the teachers of the Law and the priests stirred in them a hatred toward Jesus. They were more concerned for appearances than reality. In contrast to Jesus who became the least of all, the last and the servant of all, the Jewish authorities sought power and the first places. Jesus strongly criticized this pharisaical hypocrisy: *they tie up heavy burdens [hard to carry] and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them* (Mt 23:4). Jesus valued every human person, especially those who were poor and despised by society: the sick, lepers, sinners, prostitutes. He did not want these people to feel inferior before the injustice and contempt of others or before their own illnesses and weaknesses. Those persons who accepted their weaknesses and recognized their illness, felt more strongly the warmth and love of Jesus. For this reason the self-sufficient moralists

were unable to accept Jesus when he spoke the truth: *you cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but within you are filled with rapaciousness* (Lk 11:39); *why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?* (Mt 7:3). Only those who have the courage to look at the interior of their hearts and change their interior dispositions, only those persons are able to change the course of history. The Jewish authorities saw themselves as representatives of God on earth. They could not accept Jesus because he was born as a poor person, among a despised people. He was a poor carpenter, the friend of publicans and sinners. Jesus was the antithesis of the image that they and all Jewish people had concerning the Messiah who was to come. For this reason Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees and the Sadducees and Herodians. When the High Priest asked Jesus during his trial: *Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?* (Mk 14:61), Jesus replied: *I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven* (Mk 14:62). The High Priest tore his garments and said: *you have heard the blasphemy* (Mk 14:64), and the Sanhedrin replied: *he deserves to die* (Mt 26:66). They had decided on a speedy trial because Jesus was well known and they feared the people. Therefore, they also decided that the responsibility for his death had to fall on the hands of the politicians, namely, the Roman Empire. Jesus facilitated the process. The Jewish authorities wanted to kill Jesus. Jesus wanted to die on the cross. Jesus did nothing to escape the humiliating tortures.

2. Jesus in the house of Annas

From the Mount of Olives Jesus was brought to the house of Annas. It was night. They feared that the people already knew that Jesus was imprisoned. Thus they *questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his doctrine* (Jn 18:19). Jesus responded: *I have spoken publicly to the world. I have always taught in a synagogue or in the temple area where all the Jews gather, and in secret I have said nothing. Why ask me? Ask those who heard me what I said to them. They know what I said* (Jn 18:20-21). In reality, Annas did not want to interrogate Jesus but only wanted to find a motive to kill him. Jesus knew that this was the beginning of his trial and that Annas had no interest in what he thought or in his mission. Many people besieged him but very firmly and without fear Jesus responded to the pressure of Annas: *I have spoken publicly to the world.... Ask those who have heard me* (Jn 18:20-21).

It is normal that a challenge would be timid in a courtroom. Jesus has no lawyer. But Jesus opened the windows of his enemies' intelligence and confounded them. They wanted to kill him and Jesus wanted to hand over his life. Jesus knew that his trial was theatre and that no one was interested in the truth of his words. The soldiers

knew that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus but had been unable to do so. Now, hatred influences their decision. Jesus' response to Annas unleashed violence — a strong soldier who had been trained to beat people, struck Jesus violently and without warning on the face. Jesus accepted the traumatic and painful blow. A scar formed on his face and he felt dizzy. Jesus responded: *if I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong; if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?* (Jn 18:23).

Jesus' reaction to this first blow points out three brilliant characteristics that Jesus would continue to show in all the tortures inflicted on him:

1. Jesus thought before reacting;
2. He never returned the aggression of his attackers;
3. He was able to make his attackers penetrate their interior and rethink the true motives of their violence.

A person who is offended is seldom able to think before reacting. To regain control of the thinking process, the *I* has to control negative thoughts, call them into question and critique them. In this way one can be master of oneself. When we are under stress, we react instinctively and not as rational human beings. Our unconscious memory produces reactions of fear, anger, hatred, desperation, etc., which obstruct the ability to think. Jesus did not allow himself to be disturbed in this way. The same courage that he used to speak the truth, he used to protect his emotions when faced with these stressful situations. The only thing that dominated him was love.

We lose our patience, especially with those with whom we are most intimate and in such situations we injure ourselves and others. We live in the worst prison in the world; namely, we are slaves to our unconsciousness, which causes us to react with ill-conceived and negative thinking. Jesus never reacted in a violent way against others. In response to the soldier's blow, Jesus, through love, struck at the heart of the soldier's aggressiveness and made him rethink his position and enabled him to see that his aggression was harmful to himself as well as others. He could see that he acted unjustly in order to gain favor with his superiors and did not honor his own conscience. He was stimulated to think and thus free himself from the prison of his selfishness and hatred.

3. Jesus in the house of Caiaphas

The whole Sanhedrin had gathered together. It was early morning. They had fabricated false testimony and there was no consistency in their words. Their hatred and desperation to condemn Jesus made them irrational. Jesus remained stone silent while others became tense and anxious. Jesus was unafraid and rose above this

trial. The problem of inconsistency among the Pharisees was the result of their psycho-adaptation, that is, *they acted on the emotional level and unwittingly destroyed the simplicity, creativity and ability to learn and contemplate and create that which is beautiful.*² This is the ability of the emotions to adapt to painful or pleasing stimuli. It is important for the normal functioning of the mind and if it is not well controlled, it imprisons people, especially those who are engaged in intense intellectual work. We lose our sensitivity when faced with these stimuli because of frequent exposure to such situations. Psycho-adaptation is positive when we desire to understand some science or art, for this stimulates us to further growth or study; or when we realistically confront losses, the weight of suffering is diminished by psycho-adaptation. On the contrary, psycho-adaptation can be prejudicial when it makes us insensitive to the pain of others, to the prejudices, discriminations, injustices and violence that is inflicted on others; or insensitive to our own lies, misery and mediocrity; or when it makes us lose pleasure in living, in relating to others, in working and in rejoicing in the simple and beautiful things that happen to us or that we are able to do.

The unconscious motive of the Jewish Holocaust during the Second World War was negative psycho-adaptation: Nazi propaganda and focused psychic tension acted on the unconsciousness of the soldiers in a way that made it possible to reject the Jewish people and to place an irrational value on the Arian race. As the war continued, the soldiers lost all sensitivity toward the suffering of children, women, and the elderly who eyes had become sunken by terror. The same phenomenon contributed to the downfall of the Jewish people because the Jewish authorities murdered Jesus. During the trial they bombarded Jesus with questions. Jesus did not respond because all of these questions were irrelevant. Jesus only responded when the High Priest, in the name of God, asks him if he is the Messiah, the Son of God. He confirmed the fact that he was the Messiah, even though this response occasioned sadistic violence and death. Yet he went on to say that even though they might kill him, he would overcome death; even though at this moment he was humiliated and condemned, he would one day come to judge humankind, including those who at this time judged him and condemned him. He had the audacity to say that he would sit at the right hand of the Almighty, the source of all power (cf. Mk 14:55-62). The Jewish authorities tore their garments and were scandalized by the blasphemy. They ridiculed this *false son of God* (cf. Mk 14:63-65). They were unable to see that God was hidden in the flesh of a man.

² Translator's Note: In the Spanish text the words in italics are in quotation marks but no reference is given except those writings that are listed in the bibliography. I do not know what work is being cited here.

The calm, tranquil and serene behavior of Jesus upset his enemies and increased the degree of violence inflicted on him. But Jesus fulfilled what he had taught his disciples: *do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather, be afraid of the one who can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna* (Mt 10:28). This explains how in the midst of pain, Jesus achieved the height of meekness. This also explains why Jesus extends to us the most beautiful invitation: *Come to me, all you who are labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest... learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart... for my yoke is easy, and my burden light* (Mt 11:28-30).

Jesus teaches us, in the most difficult moments of our life, to trust in the Father and his love, to live life and live in love in the midst of all obstacles and live as children of God and never detest ourselves, our conscience or the truth.

One of the illnesses of our present society is the *accelerated thought syndrome*. This occurs most often in those who are engaged in intellectual work. It is the difficulty of balancing the construction of our thoughts. There is a super-production of thoughts: anticipated thoughts, remembrances, anxieties, fears, existential dissatisfaction, emotional fluctuations, inability to concentrate, migraines, intense physical weariness because we are unable to slow down the thinking process and conserve the psychic and physical energy that is being expended. Teachers have more difficulty teaching today than in previous times because students today think with a more rapid rhythm than in previous ages. Students and teachers are in two different schools and move in two different rhythms. Anti-depressants and social anxiety medication help but do not produce serenity, peace and a joy in living. The true solution is found in what Jesus taught us: to look into the very roots of our being, to turn toward God and find rest and peace and strength that flows from God. Step by step, at every moment during his passion, Jesus was intimately united with his Father and he found strength and peace. With Jesus, our crosses and burdens are made lighter and easier to bear because they are changed into the cross and burden of Jesus himself who leads us to the Father: *my yoke is easy, and my burden light* (Mt 11:30).

The Roman trial of Jesus

The Roman Empire was represented in Judea by Pontius Pilate and in Galilee by Herod. The Jewish authorities had to convince Pilate to crucify Jesus. Pilate did not want to be responsible for Jesus' death and the Jewish authorities, because of their fear of the people, also did not want this responsibility. The Jewish death penalty was carried out by stoning, a less cruel method than the Roman method

of crucifixion that was reserved for slaves and hardened criminals. The Jewish authorities presented three accusations against Jesus: he stirred up the nation, he prohibited the payment of taxes to Caesar and he said that he was king. Pilate was convinced of Jesus' innocence but the Jewish authorities pressured Pilate who insisted: *I find no guilt in him* (Jn 18:38). He knew that Jesus had been handed over to him because of envy. Pilate asked Jesus if he was king, Jesus, who had moved Pilate to think and carry on a just trial, responded: *Do you say this on your own or have others told you about me?* (Jn 18:34). Pilate did not understand and stated: *I am not a Jew, am I?... What have you done?* (Jn 18:35). Jesus responded: *My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom did belong to this world, my attendants would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews* (Jn 18:36). So Pilate said to him: *Then you are a king?* (Jn 18:37). Jesus responded: *You say I am a king. For this I was born and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth* (Jn 18:37). There is another world, distinct from this physical and temporal world. There, in that other world, Jesus is king. He came into this world to teach the truth, to teach people how to live and love. For this reason Jesus rejected the privileges of the kings of this world.

Pilate did not understand Jesus' truth. When he discovered that Jesus was from Galilee, he sent him to Herod who had killed John the Baptist. Human life had no value in the hands of such an individual. Herod asked Jesus many questions, but he remained silent. Herod ridiculed him and dressed him as a king and sent him back to Pilate (cf. Lk 23:6-11). Many take advantage of the pain that is inflicted on the poor. Jesus, in silence, looks, suffers, forgives and loves all with the love of his Father.

Pilate, wishing to free Jesus, presented an option to the Jews: Jesus or Barabbas. The Teacher of life and love was cast aside by the plans of God and the people asked for the liberation of Barabbas. Jesus remained silent in order to teach us not to fall into emotional traps and not to gravitate around what others think or say about us.

Pilate, cruel and proud, would not give in to the pressure of the Jewish authorities. He expressed his anger at the way he had been challenged. He gave an order to whip Jesus and then free him. The Roman soldiers now satisfied their violent appetite and beat Jesus with a whip. This beating tore apart Jesus' flesh. It is difficult to imagine the pain that Jesus experienced when these brutal blows were inflicted on him. Only the mysterious union with his Father enabled him to remain lucid and loving. He prayed and conversed with his Father as each blow cut into his flesh. The soldiers, observing his resistance and knowing that he was accused of proclaiming himself to be a king, mocked him as a false king and placed on him a crown of thorns. Psychological analysis of human

behavior reveals that people, when they are angry and in public, react like animals and they try to prove to one another that they are crueler. Mel Gibson's film, *The Passion*, points out to us the reality of the violence, sadism, ridicule and taunts that the Roman soldiers directed against Jesus. Never before had anyone paid such a great price for the unconditional love of humankind.

Behold the man! (Jn 19:5), said Pilate as he presented Jesus to the Jews. He had no semblance of a human being and appears to be part of a masquerade. Pilate wanted to move the Jews to compassion, but for the first time the Sanhedrin told Pilate that Jesus ought to die because he had said that he was the Son of God. Pilate panicked and asked Jesus, *where are you from?* (Jn 19:9). Jesus did not respond. Pilate spoke again: *Do you not speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you and I have power to crucify you?* (Jn 19:10). Jesus responded: *You would have no power over me if it had not been given to you from above. For this reason the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin* (Jn 19:11). From that moment Pilate tried to free Jesus and was bewildered by him. Jesus had received authority *from above*, from an authority higher than Rome. In fact, that challenge conferred authority upon the judge. There is a power in the universe that is the source of all other powers. Pilate and the Jewish authorities had been defeated, but Jesus remained undefeated. When Jesus had almost no physical strength left, he defeated the thinking of Pilate. Only a person who had dominated all the roots of fear, could be so free. Pilate was afraid of an uprising by the Jewish leaders, who in turn were afraid of the multitude if Jesus were freed. Pilate was afraid of Tiberius Caesar, the Emperor. This was the card that the Jewish leaders played even though they hated being subjected to the Roman authorities. They told Pilate: *we have no king but Caesar* (Jn 19:15). If he did not crucify Jesus, then Pilate would be admitting that there was another king in Israel, one not designated by the Empire. This was the scene, conscious and unconscious, that dominated the greatest trial in history. Pilate, intimidated and pressured, gave in because he was afraid of losing power. Jesus could have appealed to Caesar but he made no such legal claim. He simply waited for the conclusion of his trial. Pilate relented against his own conscience. To soothe his guilt feelings, he made a gesture that has become famous: he washed his hands (cf. Mt 27:24). The dirt on one's hands is removed with water. One's conscience is cleansed by recognizing the truth of one's errors and learning to be faithful to the truth of one's conscience. Jesus never acted contrary to his conscience. We, however, frequently act against our conscience. Jesus never used his power to pressure anyone. He waited for the moment to air out and illuminate the dark recesses of their minds and lives, but he gave people the freedom to make mistakes and then correct them.

Jesus and the cross

Jesus was arrested secretly at night. His brief trial took place during the early hours of the morning. On Friday morning, the sentence was handed down. Jesus did not focus on his pain or the aggression of those who abused him. He was constantly motivated by his love for the Father and his love for all people, his sisters and brothers. It is difficult for us to understand this because we do not know how to deal with life's inherent difficulties that tend to paralyze us rather than free us for a greater love. Many small and great pains will accompany us during our existential journey. Jesus teaches us how to convert the pains that knock on our doors into excellent tools that can shape our souls. Jesus carries his cross to the place of crucifixion by the power of the Spirit rather than the little physical strength that remained after so many tortures. He lacked physical strength and the soldiers asked Simon, a Cyrenian, to help Jesus. This is an additional pain for Jesus who did not want to cause pain to anyone, but Jesus thanked Simon for his help. In the multitude that followed Jesus, some women cried when they saw Jesus. He consoled them and took on their suffering, suffering that would later befall them and their children. Jesus' friends learned from him that they need not be afraid to cry and to love; there was no need to be afraid to express their feelings like Jesus did. If in the past we experienced discrimination, rejection and humiliation, we need to put these experiences into a different perspective so that we do not become victims but authors of our history. We need to learn how to protect our emotions like Jesus did. With love we can avoid hatred, rejection and humiliation of others and penetrate their hearts. When Jesus arrived at Golgotha, he was not allowed to die with his clothes on. He was crucified in the nude, the height of social embarrassment. On the cross was placed, in mockery, his title as king and this was written in three languages. In reality, Jesus is the king of love, the king of himself, and the lord of those who are fragile, fearful, slaves of selfishness and violence. From a psychological point of view, it is humanly impossible to produce altruistic thoughts from the cross. Jesus defies these psychological principles: at the height of physical and emotional pain, he produced the most beautiful poetry of solidarity: *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do* (Lk 23:34). From the beams of the cross Jesus revealed the existence of an invisible person who was the primary spectator of this chaos. The Father is the main actor. Jesus had always been with the Father. This supplication of the Son expressed the depths of his love for humankind.

Jesus consoled a criminal when he said: *today you will be with me in Paradise* (Lk 23:43).

He also consoled his mother: *Woman, behold your son* (Jn 19:26) and then consoled John: *Behold your mother* (Jn 19:27). Crying out to God, not the Father, he exclaimed: *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me* (Mk 15:34).

I thirst (Jn 19:28). Jesus spoke these words after being on the cross for hours — his lips and tongue were split because of a lack of water. The soldiers gave him vinegar which produced in him a burning sensation because the acetic acid penetrated the open sores in his mouth.

It is finished (Jn 19:30). Jesus planned his life and death. The cross is an absurdity for those who do not understand this reality.

Father, into your hands I commend my spirit (Lk 23:46). Jesus returned to the Father, the Beginning and the End of all.

From that moment, almost 2000 years ago, humankind began to walk in a new direction. A silent revolution began in the hearts of millions of people who followed Jesus, meek and humble of heart. Today, Jesus helps us to shape this meekness in our heart and to do this at a time when we are most in need of this virtue.

Bibliography

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All of the above books are part of a series *Análisis de la inteligencia de Cristo* (Analysis of Christ's intelligence).

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