

Jesus Christ - our Teacher and our Guide

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ABSTRACT

The teaching aspect of our Saviour Jesus Christ's mission, along with the priestly and kingly service, completes the array of Messianic works encompassed by the redeeming activity of the Embodied Son of God. As a Teacher, Christ our Lord teaches us, in the most complete and easiest assimilable way, the truth about God, about the creation, about His most beloved being – man and his destination: the Kingdom of Heaven. His sermon does not limit itself to a discourse but, using as a teaching means the parable, determines the auditor to let himself carried away in familiar and at the same time unknown universes, because by means of usual images, the listener is introduced into the mysterious universe of the divine works.

Keywords: Messianic activity, Evangel, Christian teaching

INTRODUCTION

The commandment given by our Saviour to His Holy Apostles: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations ...” (Mt. 28: 19) concerns not just those disciples, but all the disciples of all the times. Consequently, preaching the teaching inherited from the Embodied Son of God becomes a mission for all the Christians, and preaching the Evangel means speaking about God and about His love, overflowing on man and on the whole world.

Reading and learning the words of our Lord Jesus Christ is everyone's duty; yet, explaining them is incumbent only to those who have gone, somehow, beyond the stage of novice and dare to share with others from what they themselves have received. The word of the Scripture, being a divine word, has a mysterious charge, which can hardly be understood by the human mind. It is precisely for this reason that our Saviour Himself has tried to present His teaching in a language as simple as possible, and, where it was necessary, He gave the explanations necessary for understanding the message. In this sense, His parables have always been an attraction, both for those who have been listening to them, and for those who are reading them.

The Holy Scripture provides answers to the essential questions man is asking himself, regarding God, regarding the world and regarding his own person created from the clay brought to life by the divine breath; yet, only in relation with the Spring of knowledge can we understand the mysteries lying at the basis of these realities. It is precisely for this reason that the human person needs to be understood rather like state of communion with God, starting from man's search of Him and continuing with man's attempt to draw close to Him, using, in his approaches, both the experience, and the words, to render the discovery lived.

The calling of man to existence, by means of the Holy Trinity's counsel: “Let Us make man in Our image and after Our likeness” (cf. Genesis 1: 26) entails the calling

towards perfection, represented as an ascent towards eternal life. But this spiritual ascent cannot be realized except in close connection with God, from Whom the voice that is calling comes and to Whom we ought to turn our whole being. From here results the need to know God, as a desideratum guiding our life, as our Saviour confesses: “this is eternal life: that they know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You sent” (John 17:3).

1. JESUS CHRIST – THE TEACHER OF THE WORLD

Whenever the Messianic activity of the Embodied Son of God is mentioned, His three works or services are indicated, namely: Teacher or Prophet, High Priest and King. Next, we shall expand on the first of these dignities, that of teacher, trying to highlight not just the content of His teaching, but especially the form under which it has been transmitted.

Our Saviour is The Teacher by excellence [1] - Rabbi, as He shows Himself to be: “One is your Teacher: Christ” (Mt. 23:8, 10); He is “One” not in the sense of singularity or exclusivity”, as Father Constantin Galeriu writes, “but of supreme reveller of the truth” [2]. Regarding this aspect, Father Dorin Opri considers: “By His uniqueness one must not at all understand the desire of being the only preacher of the whole truth, transmitted with might in order to be able to awaken and purify the spirits, to make them partakers of the Truth” [3]. He is not a teacher like any other man, but, in the activity He is accomplishing, He takes this mission of teacher to the highest level possible. Father Prof. Dumitru Stăniloae says in this sense: “He is the Teacher in the supreme sense by His very Person, because it is from His very Person that His teaching comes, which shows man’s true road towards the perfect eternity of the existence” [4].

Having the qualities of a perfect educator, the Lord Christ was called in the patristic literature The Pedagogue. Clement of Alexandria, in his work bearing this title, justifies for what reason only our Saviour can be called this way: “The Pedagogue is Christ. Sometimes He calls Himself the Shepherd, saying: «I am the good Shepherd.» (John10:11-14). According to a metaphor, inspired by the shepherds shepherding the sheep, Jesus ... is the Pedagogue taking us, the children, unto salvation. The word spoke very clearly about this by Hosea, saying: «I am your teacher.» (Hosea 5: 2)” [5].

As a Teacher, our Saviour Christ reveals to the world the Evangel, namely the good news of the divine mercy arrived upon man to save him, and the eternal truths regarding God’s Person and His eternal Kingdom. In His mission, Christ the Lord has in view to transmit everything that man needs to know about God, about the world, about himself, the essence that would lead him to salvation. “As the Son of God, He reveals the Triune God glorified, as the Logos, the creating Word, He gives to us the authentic meaning of the creation, as the Son of Man, He is offering to us the model and the plenitude that the human person is called to attain” [6].

His arrival in the world was under the sign of the discovery, from the source, of the life and love of the Most Holy Trinity, which determines Him to affirm that: “I speak about the things I have seen while with My Father...” (John 8:38). The speaking about the Father springs from the deepest intimacy, in which movement, circulation of the light and love cannot be shaded by sin [7]. In His word, Christ the Lord insisted on the concrete meaning of the Law and of the prophets of the Old Testament, law and meanings that He did not want to change, but to make full (according to Mt. 5:17), completing what was actually missing: the revelation of the great love of God, Who “so much loved the world that He gave His one and only Son that everyone who believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16). God’s universal and unconditional love becomes an example to be followed for

Christ's disciples: "A new commandment I give to you: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also must love one another." (John 13:34).

Beginning His Messianic activity by the words: "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Mt. 4:17), Jesus Christ also indicated the central topic of His sermon: God's Kingdom; yet, closely connected to this topic, he also identifies the primary conditions necessary to the access to eternal happiness: repentance and faith. "Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk. 1:15) are the first words put down by the evangelist Mark as signifying the beginning of the Saviour's preaching, words that come to illustrate the truth that in order to be the beneficiaries of salvation we need to have the power to begin a new life, we need to have the power to change our old life lived in sin by that of grace, which we receive from Christ as a reward for our faith: "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives to those He chooses" (John 5:21-22), but also as a consequence of our judgement.

Repentance opens to us the doors of the Kingdom of Heaven and, at the same time, awakens our conscience, determining us to admit the state of sinfulness we are living, to make the decision of making things right, fighting against the sinful passions in order to be reborn to a new life, pleasing to God [8].

Faith, at the same time, is our answer to God's calling, towards which we need to show our total availability as soon as we have heard it. According to Saint Paul the Apostle, "faith comes by hearing the message, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17), a truth showing the importance of God's teaching brought to the people by the Embodied Son of God and inviting to receiving His words to partake of His life: "I tell you the solemn truth, the one who hears my message and believes the One Who sent Me has eternal life and will not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life." (John 5:24). The apostles themselves got to confess their faith in the divinity of their Teacher only after they had listened to His words and were convinced that in them they find eternal life.

Christ the Lord is the supreme Teacher also because we learn not just from His divine words, but also from His example; His entire life is a sermon, is the Light of the Kingdom reflected on all those who follow the road of salvation. "I am the Light of the world", says our Saviour, "the one who follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." (John 8:12). He presents Himself as an example when He says to the Apostles: "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt. 11:29). He is the "Teacher" and "the Prophet", culminating by His very Person, because He is not just man, but also God and, consequently, He has in Himself and irradiates from Himself the true teaching not just about God, but also about the true man, as he is realized in Christ and as the others need to become [9].

2. ASPECTS OF THE SAVIOUR'S TEACHING FOUND IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

His strong voice gathered around Him multitudes of people willing to know the words of eternal life. The evangelists put down just a part of His words, which they concentrate in different groups, depending on certain themes, one of them being known as the Sermon on the Mount. Referring to this aspect, Father Professor Leon Arion affirms that "the sermon on the mount is not a stenographic rendering of a sermon, written down word by word, but a well-rendered summary... It is unitary in its content, because the psychological connection between the groups of thoughts drafted is preserved, being penetrated by a unitary plan and a common goal, namely to orient man on the road of salvation" [10].

The Sermon on the Mount offers us a group of teachings in which our Saviour expresses His attitude concerning certain aspects related to the moral Law, and concerning certain practices imposed by the Law of the Old Testament (fasting and prayer). Viewed as a whole, all this group of teachings is seen as a model or perfect guidebook of the Christian life, a sure way of drawing close to God, in our way to salvation. At the same time, relating this complex of teachings to the whole teaching activity of our Saviour Jesus Christ, we can say that The Sermon on the Mount synthesizes in its content the whole essence of the evangels and of the entire New Testament.

From this perspective, a special place is occupied by the Blessings, nine ways of reaching perfection, the true happiness; another reality, superior to the one that carrying us along every day, expressed by an ascent of nine steps. As a good knower of the human soul, Christ the Lord knows that at the basis of all man's desires and efforts is the nostalgia after the primordial happiness tasted by Adam in heaven, happiness to which man is called even since the creation, and manifested as a desire of ours to partake of such an indescribable state. This is why we say that the blessings "reveal the ultimate goal of the human existence, the ultimate target of the human acts: God is calling us to His own happiness. This ultimate calling is adressed to everyone, in a personal manner" [11].

Using the expression "blessed are...", our Saviour is calling everyone, poor and rich, to follow His exhortations, showing that our acquiring true happiness does not depend on our social or material condition, but on the way man refers to his relationship with God. It is precisely for this reason that He relates the happiness of acquiring the Kingdom of Heaven, which He announces as present and of which we can partake, to the extent to which we do the divine will in our life. Anyone who will endeavour to embody, by his actions, the divine precepts, will be liked and loved by God, receiving as a reward the true and intransient happiness.

An important feature of the Blessings is their spiritual, contemplative sense, which exhorts to reflecting more on your inner state and less on your external state. From this perspective, the Blessings focus more on to be than on to do. The conditions they propose are not dictated and do not come as an external imposition, but they need to become inner determination, a conviction of our own conscience. Becoming characteristic of the human soul, they manage to create in man another conception about the world and about man's vocation.

From this perspective, the "nine Happiness" come as a counterpart to the commandments of the Old Testament, exhorting man to act out of his own conviction, not as a constraint marked by the fear of punishment. The ten commandments of the Mosaic Law were mostly drafted in the negative, punitive form. The new principles of the Messianic kingdom form strong convictions in the believers' souls, attracting by their persuasive character, determining our actions to start not out of the fear of punishment, but out of the desire to acquire eternal happiness.

Consequently, viewed in relation to the Decalogue, the Blessings are no longer inscribed on cold tables made of stone, but are engraved in the warm hearts of the human soul according to Jeremiah' prophecy: "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt... I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they will be My people" (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

By this, we must not see an opposition between the Old Law and the New Law, but need to understand that our Saviour, by the nine exhortations, desires to encourage towards another way of knowing the Word of God and of practicing virtue. Growing in virtue is the result of our collaboration with God; God, always helping us with His grace, is waiting for us to be strong-willed and perseverant in doing good.

The great principle of perfection is proclaimed by Christ, the Lord and the Teacher, by the words: “Be perfect, just as Your Father in heaven is perfect.” (Mt. 5:48). Perfection leads to the state of eternal happiness, which we acquire as a reward for the accomplishment of the commandment of unconditional love, as Christ Himself taught us by His Passions and His Sacrifice.

Having the teaching from Himself as God, He speaks to the people revealing to them the divine things, yet being also true Man, He dresses His ideas in words that His public can understand, using images and examples taken from the daily life and from the occupations that were so familiar to His listeners. “He embraced with love and mercy the needs and the sadness of a world estranged from God and highlighted the divine revelation in the middle of the surrounding nature, in the valley of Nazareth, in the serenity of the Genezaret Lake, along the picturesque Jordan Valley, or in the silence of the mountains of the Promised Land” [12]. All these have led to the affirmation of the truth that His teaching is from the Father, as He Himself confesses (John 7:16; 8:28) or as it is admitted about Him: “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God”, Nicodemus, “a man of the Pharisees ... and ruler of the Jews” will declare to Him, coming to Him at night to feed on the divine Truth (cf. John 3:1-2).

CONCLUSIONS

Presenting Himself as God become man, the Saviour announces the Kingdom of Heaven about to reveal itself and to develop to the extent to which those who are listening to Him believe in Him and in His message. His word is also a calling to the people to truly know and receive the Kingdom, as this represents their only chance of true, eternal and full life [13].

Our Saviour Christ is the Teacher by excellence, Whose teaching attracts by the sublimity of its content and by the simplicity of its transmission, because although the ideas are unfathomably deep spiritually, they are nevertheless taught using methods accessible to all the people, regardless of their status on the social scale or the scale of the intellectual values. A special place among these methods is held by the parable, “to which He will give a unique, never ever equalled brilliance” [14].

In His speeches, the Saviour approaches the important problems related to the earthly and the future existence. He was teaching the people “with power”, not as the scholars were teaching (according to Mt. 7:29), using both the direct approach, as one can see in the Sermon on the Mount, but also an indirect, hidden approach, as one can observe in the content of the parables.

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