

A MEDITATION ON THE HOLY FACE

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"Show us your Face, Lord, and we will be saved" (Psa. 79:4). And now by the prestigious mystery of your Holy Shroud, revealed to us of the twentieth century, this Face upon which all the eyes in heaven plunge with adoration, this Face which the prophets and the kings of the Old Testament yearned to know, this Divine Face is there for us, before our marveling eyes, which never tire to contemplate its beauty.

A Face astounding in spiritual richness and simple majesty. A Face full of Light, where shimmers an ocean of thoughts vast as the world. A face lambent with absolute Truth! And at the same time, a Face of the Tenderness of that Eternal Love which draws near to seduce his ignoring or sinful creatures.

No one—if he looks with deference upon this admirable Face—no one can hide himself from the Light of God. With your eyes closed, Lord, You know us in our inner depths, as only the Creator knows what is in man.

And there we recognize You easily, for God is present everywhere; and it is by this prodigious "presence" that your features speak to us. They tell us of your powerfully reflective mind, which effortlessly knows everything in the entire universe.

You are there, silent, You who see us through your lowered eyelids. And when we fear, from the Almighty, a severe or judging word, we receive deep in our hearts the realisation of a Goodness without measure and without bounds.

You reproach us nothing. Neither the sordid sins, nor the long ingratitude of those who do not believe, nor the impious thoughts of those who find badly made this world of injustice, egoism and violence.

But who has made this world? Is it not sinning man, man guilty, before You, of an initial refusal, of a deadly deceit toward the Paternal Love?

You are the Creator: to man, made in your image, You gave liberty and You are the first to respect it. In the path of divine destiny which You assigned to him, man himself may choose: for or against. He says to You YES or he says to You NO; he loves or he rejects; he believes or he turns back into his piteous darkness.

That is why You come.

You, Absolute Being, Supreme Truth, Author of all justice, You

come to us, touch-to-touch; You range yourself beside us in Your work. Of a Virgin loved and prepared since always, You request a Body. And You show men what real Love is, in submitting Yourself to men's villainies, their lies and injustices, their betrayals and their cruelties ...

You the Eternal Beauty, You the Infinite Love, the perfect Innocence, You accept the Cross as if it were your due. You suffer death, the legitimate punishment announced by the Father to creatures enamored of the forbidden fruit. You the Word of God, You make yourself Victim of all the human race in the sight of your Father who thus again becomes Father of mankind.

It is this which is revealed in your Face, tired with suffering, and your tortured Body furrowed with bleeding wounds, as presented to us on your Holy Shroud.

To invent all that, yes, it had to be at least God, and to accomplish it—how much more so ... It is for this that we believe.

Ah, do not permit that this unheard-of superabundance of pains and divine courage be useless to those whom You have loved to such lengths.

By your tortures and by your patience, oh Jesus, God of Love, we beg You, yes, have pity on us. Come near to us in spite of our incomprehension and our little faith, in spite of that hardness of our hearts toward You, and the stiffness of our necks. Come, You who are Love, love us in the dark realm of error into which the first father plunged us. May the Light of your Divine Being and your Tenderness chase away the shadows where Satan binds us.

May the excess of your pains and spilled Blood compensate the disorders of a pleasure-seeking immoralism living for itself and not for God, which saps our growth to holiness.

May your adorable Patience under the barbarous treatment of the leaded lashes, the thorns and the nails of the Cross, procure for us the Pity, the Pardon, the Divine Mercy for these sins which human egoism demands as its right. May your Patience win pardon for our ridiculous self-sufficiency, when our petty reason raises up its poor lucubrations against the faith and the filial confidence which God so well deserves.

May the plentitude of Life, of Truth and of Love, radiant in your features, melt into repentance our hearts bent upon the earth and worldly values, to open them to that Divine Life which You have come to give us and which is infused in us through your Sacraments. For "You have come that we might have Life, and Life increasingly abundant." (John 10:10)

Render to us that which we have lost, our authentic destiny, which permits us to enter, through You and with You, into the ineffable intimacy of the Three Persons. Prepare us to contemplate in heaven your Face and your Mysteries, for our eternal joy; with Mary, the angels and the saints.

For You are the Savior whom alone we need. "Without me," You

said, "you can do nothing." (John 15:15) No one can disregard You except to lose himself far from heaven and from all hope, in the endless and irremediable misery of offered happiness refused.

Thank You, Lord; You give us hope. In Your Face we can touch, with our fingers, the reality of Redemption, and we hear anew your divine words, full of Love and Mercy: "I am the Way, the Truth, the Life." (John 14:6)