

Brother John

The Two Faces of the Cross

For many of our contemporaries, the cross is the emblem of Christianity. Is it not curious that this instrument of violent death has come to symbolize what is essential in a system of belief? For centuries, in fact, there was great aversion to depicting Jesus on the cross. The faith of the early Christians was focused instead on the good news of the resurrection: the cry “He is risen!” expressed their basic conviction.

And yet, the memory of Jesus’ execution very soon became wedded to the proclamation of his resurrection. A mere quarter-century later, Saint Paul reproduced in his first letter to the Corinthians (15:3-4) a rhythmic creed that he himself

received, expressing the heart of the Christian faith in a two-part affirmation:

Christ died for our sins in fulfillment of the Scriptures
 and he was buried
and he rose on the third day in fulfillment of the Scriptures
 and he appeared to Cephas...

This early text simply juxtaposes the two events without investigating the link between them. It limits itself to presenting Christ, dead and risen. Further reflection, however, leads us to see that the small word “and” is not trivial, but rather conceals the heart of the mystery. In fact, the way we articulate the two moments of what is called the paschal mystery has incalculable consequences for Christian life. For centuries, notably in the West, the resurrection was downplayed with respect to the passion of Christ, and this tended to foster a pessimistic outlook, centered on suffering, regarding life on earth. If today the accent has fortunately shifted towards the primacy of the resurrection in the piety of the faithful, that outlook is not without its drawbacks either. It runs the risk of minimizing the effects of evil in human life, of leaping a bit too quickly to the other bank of a rediscovered happiness, and consequently of cutting oneself off from all who are forced to deal with inexplicable suffering or who are caught up in the anguish of an apparently absurd existence. Can we find strength and inspiration in the joyful news of the resurrection without taking from the cross its full measure of seriousness?

These pages wish to make the claim that the primary interest and importance of the Easter mystery lies hidden in what grammarians call the copula, the link between subject and predicate. The Man on the cross *is* the Risen Lord: what does this statement mean, how is it possible and what are its consequences? As a way of understanding more deeply the meaning of the cross, we will attempt to circumscribe more exactly the place where the death of Jesus and his resurrection come together. It should be pointed out from the outset that this place is not directly accessible to the human mind. Though it is the keystone of the entire edifice, it escapes our grasp. Approaching it from different directions, however, will allow us to come closer and closer to the heart of our faith.

Successive stages?

A preliminary answer to the question of the link between the cross and the resurrection is *chronological*. In the gospel narratives, the passion and resurrection of Jesus are presented as successive stages. This follows from the very notion of resurrection: to get up (ἀνίστημι) or to wake up (ἐγείρω), one must first be lying down, asleep in death. And yet the resurrection is clearly distinguished from the simple reanimation of a corpse. In the stories of the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17), the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5:21-43), and espe-

cially of Lazarus (John 11), Jesus shows his power over death by bringing recently deceased people back to their former life. The resurrection, however, is something quite different. For believing Jews, it expressed the transition from the present world to the coming age, to a life incomparably different from our existence here below. It is in any case true that the resurrection follows death because the two states are opposed: to arise means to cross over from death to life.

And yet this chronological outlook is far from exhausting all the truth of the mystery and indeed may even lead us astray. It could well cause us to view the cross as a stage to leave behind, to get rid of as soon as possible, consigning to oblivion all the pain and sorrow it entailed. This way of understanding the paschal mystery comes up against a small but telling detail: in the resurrection appearances, the Christ of glory still has his wounds; they are sometimes even the very thing that enables people to recognize him. The gospel-writers seek to emphasize in this way that the crucifixion of Jesus is not simply relegated to a forgotten past but is part of the lasting identity of the Risen Christ. His sufferings and death have permanent significance for believers.

The fourth gospel expresses a parallel truth starting from Jesus' life on earth. To indicate the end of this life, Saint John uses the verb "to lift up". "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all to myself," says Jesus (John 12:32; cf.

3:14; 8:28). By this typical play on words, John refers both to the crucifixion of Jesus (that is why it is essential for him that Jesus be put to death by the Romans and not stoned according to Jewish custom: see 12:33; 18:31-32) and to his return to the Father (see 20:17; 6:62; 3:13). Here, the two moments of the Easter mystery do not follow one another but are superimposed: Jesus' death on the cross is simultaneously an exaltation, an entry into God's glory.

These details are clear indications that it is insufficient to consider death and resurrection as successive stages in time. Though essential for the *revelation* of Jesus' identity and of the meaning of his life, a chronological succession does not express fully that identity and that meaning. The Man on the cross *is* the Risen Lord; the two moments are thus permanently interrelated. In this sense, it would be more appropriate to speak of two dimensions or two faces of the paschal mystery, the shadow-side and the luminous side. We will thus examine these two aspects as they are shown in the cross, in order better to understand the relationship between them and to discover where and how one crosses over into the other. In this way we hope to clear a path between the pitfalls of a too-pessimistic conception of the Christian faith on the one hand and, on the other, of an overly "angelic" vision by which the resurrection would take away the seriousness of evil and, in so doing,

exclude any true solidarity with the trials of our fellow human beings.

The shadow-side of the cross

Looked at from without, the cross appears first of all as a *failure* in human terms. “He saved other people, and he cannot save himself!” (Mark 15:31). These words of the authorities of the nation when they saw Jesus on the cross are not merely an indication of their bad faith. Their perplexity may not have been feigned: how could someone claiming to be the Messiah sent by God to save his people end up in this way? For even if there were different opinions regarding the way it would come about, the expectation of a Messiah necessarily involved the hope of being liberated from an undesirable situation and participating in a better world. The absence of real benefits disqualified a person’s claim to being the Messiah. Moreover, such a death was not only a particularly excruciating and shameful form of torture; for the Jews it was a sign of rejection by God (see Deuteronomy 21:23). Saint Paul uses the same argument while giving it a different twist: “He was cursed for our sake” (Galatians 3:13).

If Jesus died in this ignominious way, then, it was plausible to assume that God was not with him. In our day, after the attempt at exterminating the Jewish people known as the Shoah, the

question of the divine presence in the midst of evil is still with us, although with a different nuance. The prayers arising from the gas chambers and the furnaces did not seem to reach God’s ears. Today, however, we interpret this less as God’s abandoning his people than as proof of God’s powerlessness, or even nonexistence. “If God exists and is almighty, how could he let things come to this point?” This disturbing question comes to haunt us across the centuries. On this reading, Jesus takes his place in the succession of those countless men and women who counted on God’s help and were cruelly disappointed.

Having reached this point, we can now look at the same event from the other side, placing the responsibility not on the shoulders of the victims but on that of their executioners. Seen in this way, the cross appears as *a proof of the powerlessness of good in our world*. A Mahatma Gandhi, a Martin Luther King struggled valiantly against hatred and oppression before becoming victims of lethal violence in their turn. On this earth, the efforts of those who work for good often seem ultimately futile in the face of the power of evil. Should not Jesus be seen along the same lines, as a kind of Don Quixote, a romantic as admirable as he is pitiable, fighting with weapons that are unfortunately too ineffective to prevail?

It is interesting to note that Jesus himself explains salvation history in a like manner. In his dispute with the spiritual leaders of the nation,

Jesus accuses them of always having sought to eliminate messengers from God:

See, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, some you will beat in your synagogues and chase from town to town... (Matthew 23:34)

Only afterwards do people honor them by building them impressive tombs, thus cleansing their consciences without needing to undergo a demanding change of heart (see Matthew 23:29-30).

The course of Jesus' ministry confirms this general rule of the inevitable failure of good in this world. At the beginning of his public life, we see him attracting a growing number of followers, amazed by his teaching (see Mark 1:27-28) and especially by his acts of healing (see Matthew 15:30-31). But when people begin to perceive the demanding nature of his words, not primarily because they ask for what is impossible but because what he offers necessarily calls into question the categories and the priorities of the hearers, gradually they begin to turn away, and even to turn against him. In the end, after even his closest associates have fled for fear of their lives, Jesus is left all alone to face his fate (see Mark 14:27-31,50).

Saint John shows this whole process in a nutshell in chapter 6 of his gospel. At the beginning "a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs he was accomplishing on the sick" (John 6:2). When the people come to him, Jesus feeds them all with five loaves and two fishes. They

then want to make him king so they can permanently benefit from his powers and, when he makes his escape, they go looking for him and follow him to the other side of the lake.

At that point, Jesus tries to deepen their understanding of his mission and what he has to offer. He speaks of "food that lasts to eternal life" (6:27), "God's bread...coming down from heaven and giving life to the world" (6:33). He then reveals that he is this bread of life (6:35-40). At that point, the hearers begin to "grumble", like the Israelites in the wilderness long ago (see Exodus 15:24; 16:2; 17:3 etc.): Jesus' offer leads only to incomprehension and division. When Jesus goes even further by stating that the bread is his flesh, and that to have life it is necessary to eat his flesh and drink his blood (6:51-58), the scandal comes to a climax: "From then on, many of his disciples stopped following him and no longer went about with him" (6:66). The offer of life, so attractive at first, ends up by clashing with people's settled convictions, leading to arguments (see 6:52) and to rejecting the gift and the giver.

A deadly paradox

If Jesus' existence, and especially his death, reveals the incompatibility between our world and the good, the problem may therefore not be primarily on the side of God. This realization takes

our understanding of the cross to a deeper level: the cross brings to light the *limits of the human endeavor*, notably of its religion and its justice. In the Passion narrative, what is best in religion comes from the Jewish people. They are the ones who have received a unique revelation from God, to the point that Jesus can affirm that “salvation comes from the Jews” (John 4:22). Later on, his disciples will turn to the Jewish Scriptures in order to find the keys to understanding his mission. And yet, at a critical moment during the trial of Jesus, the religious leaders of this people speak these highly significant words to the Roman governor: “We have a Law, and according to that Law he has to die...” (John 19:7). Now the Law, the Torah, is the quintessence of the Jewish religion, where divine revelation and human interpretation are intertwined. If the religious leaders of Israel do not find in their Law the light necessary to recognize the One who comes in the name of the Lord, then in the end that Law only reveals the limits of their understanding of God. The pinnacle of human religion was unsuccessful in helping them discern the day of God’s visit (see Luke 19:44).

Saint Paul, in his letters to the Galatians and especially to the Romans, takes up this topic on a more abstract level. Good in itself, even holy, the Law was diverted from its true end by the human tendency to self-justification. As a result, its holiness is manifested negatively; it serves only to reveal the extent of evil (see Romans 7:7-13).

Human justice in its highest manifestation, on the other hand, is symbolized by the imposing authority of Rome. In the story of the Passion, it takes flesh in the figure of Pontius Pilate. After a meticulous examination of the accused and the proofs of his guilt, the governor declares him innocent not once but three times (see Luke 23:4,14,22; John 18:38; 19:4,6), yet he hands Jesus over to be tortured to death. The highly vaunted justice of Rome is thus shown incapable of saving an innocent life, and Pilate remains alone with his two questions: “Where are you from?” and “What is truth?” (John 18:38; 19:9). The crucifixion of Jesus displays for all to see the inability of human beings to understand and welcome the presence of God.

Stepping back and looking at things from a higher viewpoint, we can say that Jesus’ life, and especially his death, reveals a “deadly paradox” that characterizes our human condition. It can be summed up in the following propositions: we aspire to greater life, but at the same time we find ourselves unable to undertake the steps necessary to reach that life.

These two aspects are recapitulated at the very beginning of the Bible in the call of Abraham (see Genesis 12:1-4). God enters into his existence with the promise of a blessing, in Biblical terms of greater life. But to enter into this life, Abraham is called to leave behind the world he knows and to set out on an adventure with God. The patriarch for his part undertakes the journey, whereas more

often than not over the centuries, human beings prefer the ease of a settled existence to the rigors of a pilgrimage in the steps of the Lord.

This tragic refusal is seen in exemplary fashion in the life of Jesus. We have already noted that, as the road becomes more demanding, the crowds and even his disciples begin to turn away. Jesus is fully aware of this: “You do not want to come to me to have life!” (John 5:40; see 12:37-40; 2:23-25). But there is more. To become disenchanted with a teacher and leave him is one thing; to wish to kill him is another. Early on, Jesus experiences resistance; some find his presence and his claims intolerable (see Mark 3:6). This attitude, which will grow stronger and stronger until it culminates in the crucifixion, offers rich material for reflection. If you attempt to eliminate someone, that is because you are unable to stand what he or she represents; expressed starkly, you kill in order not to die, to save yourself. Now Jesus obviously does not threaten anybody’s physical existence. It is rather his words and his entire attitude that call a whole way of life into question, tolling the death-knoll of a society based on the exaltation of self at the expense of others, referred to by Saint John as “the world” and by Saint Paul as “the flesh”. Those who act in that way can only hear as a death-sentence Jesus’ affirmation, expressed by his whole life, that in God’s eyes no one is privileged, that our advantages are in reality gifts to be received with gratefulness and to share generously for the good of our fellows.

Jesus expresses this paradox of the human con-

dition, shown in the attitudes towards him, by borrowing some words found in Psalms prayed by good people who are persecuted: “They hated me without reason” (John 15:25; see Psalm 35:19; 69:5). Naturally, his executioners and their collaborators had their reasons for putting Jesus to death. But if Jesus is in fact the Innocent One, if his deepest desire, shown in his acts, is to communicate life in fullness, then the will to eliminate him is literally absurd. It is a fatal misunderstanding that betrays hatred of the very Source of life (see John 15:23), a mistake that leads to suicidal behavior. Jesus’ death thus brings to light the contradiction lying at the root of our human condition: what human beings most desire, they are unable to receive unless they open themselves to that which (and the One who) comes from elsewhere, and this requires leaving behind an existence built upon the illusion of self-sufficiency; it means undergoing a kind of death to oneself. But in order not to die, one kills, and in killing the Source of life one in effect commits suicide. This explains the virulence of the hatred against Jesus: we are never as furious as when we hear arguments that in our heart we know to be true but which we do not wish to admit for anything in the world. The deep-seated anger within us shows that we are locked in a desperate struggle against ourselves.

The culmination of the shadow-side of the cross is thus *the revelation of a paradox or contradiction that characterizes our human condition*. We

could more precisely call it a knot. When you try to undo a knot by pulling the ends of the rope, in fact you only make it tighter. The energies used to solve the problem serve instead to make it worse. Thus in attempting to silence the voice of the Innocent One who brings to light our complicity with death, paradoxically we close off the only way out. We barricade ourselves in the very place where God cannot reach us. By putting Jesus to death, at the same time humankind kills the most authentic part of itself and so condemns itself to a living death. The only consolation is that, by exposing this contradiction to the light of day, the cross offers a way of going beyond it. Diagnosing the illness is a necessary step on the road to healing.

The luminous face of the cross

In fact, the manifestation of the other face of the paschal mystery requires hitting rock bottom. Jesus is not saved in the sense that the downward movement is interrupted. No *deus ex machina* arrives at the last minute to keep evil from exercising its wiles to the very end. On the contrary, the Innocent One has to die, in this way signing the death-warrant of a world that refuses Life and bringing it down with him to the abyss (“by dying he destroyed death,” says an age-old prayer). From the debris of

this world something new can be born, if indeed a Power of life exists that is not swallowed up in the general conflagration.

It is thus only on the morning of the third day, when Jesus is really and truly dead – a death whose irrevocable character is expressed in the tradition by the descent to Sheol or Hades, the kingdom of the dead underneath the earth – and his disciples have experienced the shipwreck of all their hopes (see Luke 24:21), that the new beginning takes place. Some women visit the tomb and, instead of finding the corpse, hear the resurrection announced. Then the disciples, individually or in groups, encounter the Crucified One as someone alive and still with them. The New Testament gives us no unambiguous account of these events, since it is virtually impossible to describe realities on “the other side” using the words and images of our world here below. In any case, what matters most, the definitive “proof”, is the changed attitude of the disciples of Jesus. Frightened people, turned towards the past, become women and men filled with a crazy hope, ready to give their lives for the conviction that the adventure goes on and that, risen from the dead, the crucified Jesus continues to lead them in his wake towards true Life.

The changed outlook triggered by the good news of the resurrection had one immediate consequence: it caused the disciples to view the past, and notably the cross, in a brand-new way. If God was – and still is – with Jesus to that extent, his

death could no longer be interpreted as a failure or as an indication of God's absence or powerlessness. On the contrary, all the events of the past must have been part of a certain divine wisdom or logic. But how can this logic be grasped? In what way could God have turned such an atrocious death to good use in order to reveal and to communicate his loving designs?

We should not forget that the disciples of Jesus were Jews. And when faced by any enigma concerning the meaning of life, the Jews in those days had one infallible recourse – the Scriptures. They therefore had to re-read the Bible, our Old Testament, in the light of Jesus' resurrection, to try and understand how the end of his life could be part of God's plan for the universe he created.

One of the first consequences of the resurrection, for the disciples of Jesus, was thus a new way of reading the Scriptures that took into account the event of the cross. We should not be surprised, incidentally, that the Jewish nation as a whole was unable to identify Jesus unambiguously as its promised Messiah from the outset. The reason is quite simple: outside of the light of the resurrection, such an interpretation is far from obvious. It places at the center elements which earlier were only marginal.

For example, the disciples of Jesus were led to accord greater importance to the psalms which express the situation of someone unjustly persecuted. In those prayers, the gap between appearances and the reality in God is particularly strik-

ing. The one who seemed to be the “laughing-stock of everyone, a worm and not a human being” (Psalm 22:7) was in fact God's friend. Such prayers provided a framework which made Jesus' death no longer unthinkable. It is thus understandable that the Gospel accounts of the Passion are sprinkled with such reminiscences.

There is one Old Testament passage which illustrates particularly well the new way of reading the Bible in the light of Christ's death and resurrection. It is usually known as the fourth song of the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 52:13–53:12). Like the Psalms, these verses lay stress on the contrast between the protagonist's appearance in the eyes of others and his true condition. “Without form or splendor...a person despised” he was considered “stricken, smitten by God and humiliated”, whereas in reality he was blameless, someone obediently filling a role given him by God. At the same time, the song goes beyond any simple contrast. It tells of the spectators' change of outlook: they are utterly amazed to see the exaltation of the one whom they previously believed cursed by God. Surprisingly, a sacred text written centuries earlier describes an experience almost identical with that of the witnesses to Jesus' death! It is understandable that in their eyes this was no coincidence, but rather offered a key for understanding what they had just gone through.

Isaiah 53 goes still further. The passage defines the Servant's role as a kind of exchange between

him and his fellows. The Innocent One takes the place of his wayward contemporaries, so that “he was wounded for *our* transgressions, crushed for *our* iniquities”. Taking on himself their guilt, he communicates his own innocence to them. It is important to note that the description of this “exchange” functions as a revelation, a word from God that sheds light on what previously seemed inexplicable, or even absurd. It is far from being a simple observation needing explanation in its turn, a kind of human mechanism whose components would require analysis. On the contrary, when the hearers recognize that the Servant is suffering “for them,” that has the startling effect of a true revelation from God that serves to illuminate the mystery of innocent suffering.

Solidarity that overcomes division

In the wake of Isaiah 53 read in the light of Jesus’ resurrection, the cross appears as *the ultimate act of solidarity*. God does not save humankind “from above,” so to speak, by waving a magic wand. On the contrary, he shares the human condition down to its lowest point (cf. Philippians 2:8). Jesus had already shown this by the first act of his public life, his baptism. John had announced the coming of someone “more powerful... [to] baptize in the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matthew 3:11). Then Jesus came as an ordinary man and asked

John to baptize him, in other words he set himself voluntarily alongside sinners in search of forgiveness, going down with them into the waters of death and arising for a new life. Healing can only come from within the human condition to transform it imperceptibly but irresistibly, like the yeast that gradually causes the whole loaf to rise (see Matthew 13:33).

Such an act of solidarity, by which the Innocent One identifies with the guilty, immediately does away with all the walls we erect between individuals and groups to put ourselves in the right. “If others are bad, then obviously I am good.” The cross puts an end to the human divisions of race and religion (see Ephesians 2:14), and even of behavior, to present us to God all together, prodigal sons and daughters who are nonetheless his beloved children. Looked at from the vantage-point of the cross, all human pretensions are unmasked. In this same spirit Saint Paul, speaking like a prophet of old, cries out: “Where are the wise? Where are the experts? Where are the fine talkers of this age?” (1 Corinthians 1:20).

This solidarity that overcomes differences and creates unity before God is shown at the same time to be *the authentic response to evil*. By accepting to give his life for his executioners, Jesus proclaims a truth so simple that we constantly disregard it: you cannot eliminate evil by using the same weapons. Can it not be said that the history of our race, from war to war and from oppression to oppression, is a

tale of how we forget this basic truth? At the beginning of his public life, Jesus had invited his hearers to respond to evil with good in imitation of their heavenly Father (see Luke 6:27ff; Matthew 5:38ff) and now he takes his own advice: “when abused he did not abuse in return, when suffering he did not threaten...” (1 Peter 2:23). In this he was truly the Servant of God (see 1 Peter 2:22-25) who trusted in the creative power of the Lord rather than in the apparent effectiveness of violence (see Isaiah 50:6-7). In addition, he revealed that this divine power is nothing other than an excessive love that appears as folly to human eyes, the attitude of the shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep to save the one who is lost, or of the businessman who pays a whole day’s wages to those who did only a single hour’s work. If we wish to call this excess of love forgiveness, we must immediately add that the example of Jesus removes any lingering connotation of condescendence from this notion. Here, it is clearly not the patronizing behavior of a superior who deigns to grant a respite in order to show how generous he is, but rather that of a lover who puts his own life on the line by sharing the condition of the lowest of the low, so that nobody is low any longer.

And finally, Jesus’ act shows us *the true meaning of existence*. It tells us implicitly that living consists in giving oneself for love and not clinging to what one has out of fear or selfishness. It lies in causing goods to circulate rather than possessing them to death. Such a life may take on the appearance

of suffering, of failure, and even be manifested in dying, whereas an apparently “successful” life may be in fact a death. The cross thus reveals, on the one hand, Jesus’ understanding of the meaning of human life (see the key saying quoted six times by the gospel-writers: Matthew 10:39; 16:25; Mark 8:35; Luke 9:24; 17:33; John 12:25). On the other hand, it discloses God’s own secret. At the opposite extreme from a potentate jealous of his rank, God is the consummate Giver. And as a result “Christ Jesus, being of divine condition, did not consider equality with God a privilege, but emptied himself, taking the condition of a slave” (Philippians 2:5-7). By communicating God’s life to us, Christ turns us truly into human beings in the image of God, beings who find their happiness in the definitive gift of self.

The place of transition

In contemplating the cross of Jesus, then, we discover its two faces. On the one hand the cross as failure, as a sign of the powerlessness of good in our world with its corollary, the self-condemnation of this world and the end of all hoping. On the other hand, the cross as the revelation of authentic life in terms of solidarity and the refusal to respond to evil with evil, the cross as the emblem of an “excessive” love. We can now return to the question with which we began, that of the articulation between

the two faces. Where is the place of transition, where the shadow-side of the cross is metamorphosed into a source of light?

Fortunately, in Luke's Gospel we find a passage that illustrates this crossing wondrously – the story of the two evildoers crucified with Christ (Luke 23:39-43). In the other gospels no distinction is made between the two. Here, however, one of them, while hanging on the cross himself, insults Jesus by aping the sentiments of the Jewish leaders and the Roman soldiers: "Aren't you the Christ? Save yourself and us too!" The proof that someone comes from God, in that man's eyes, is that he can make use of miraculous powers – and that he will do so for *him*. Moreover, by forging an alliance with those in power and by mocking Jesus, the first criminal exalts himself at Jesus' expense. Even in the face of imminent death, he tries to distinguish himself from others to acquire a superiority that is as short-lived as it is illusory.

The second evildoer reacts quite differently. Although customarily known as "the good thief," we have no evidence that he was any better than his companion. The difference is that he does not deny his true condition. He senses that the man alongside him, tortured to death like him, is nonetheless innocent. That man chose to be there next to him, by a free and incomprehensible act of solidarity; he can thus be trusted. All at once, the criminal realizes that he is not alone to face his fate; Jesus is with him. He can then both admit his guilt and confidently hope

that the one who lowered himself to join him will never abandon him, come what may. "Jesus, remember me, when you come as king." And immediately he hears the reply both longed for and unexpected: "Today you will be with me in Paradise." Together now in hell, they will be together in the enjoyment of a restored Life.

This story situates with precision the link between the two faces of the mystery, or more exactly the transition from one to the other. It is above all a matter of *the way we see*. When we contemplate the face of the Man on the cross and discern in him the One sent from God to be with us, the eminently Innocent One, we have already passed over to the other side, even if that is not yet visible. At the opposite extreme from a "happy ending" that would cause the horrors of the crucifixion to vanish into thin air, the resurrection is the unveiling of its true meaning. And yet we must immediately add that this new way of seeing is not humanly explicable; it is a gift of clear vision that comes straight from the Spirit of God.

It is significant in this respect that Saint John concludes his account of the Passion by quoting another enigmatic text from the Hebrew Scriptures (Zechariah 12:9–13:2), which some see as an adaptation of the fourth Servant song. Again it is a question of an altered way of seeing. The passage speaks of a "Pierced One" who, after a spirit from God is poured out, is recognized by his former adversaries as "an only son... a firstborn" and awak-

ens in them a great lamentation. Then, a fountain of forgiveness springs up for the whole land. “They will look upon the one they have pierced” (Zechariah 12:10; John 19:37). The fourth gospel affirms in this way that the link between the death and resurrection of Christ is situated within each one of us, in the way we see. By contemplating the crucified Christ until we discern in him the revelation of God’s excessive love in the midst of – and in spite of – human refusal, we cross over with him to the other side, to a Life with no ending; we enter the world of the resurrection. No understanding of the Easter mystery is possible from the outside; before the cross there is no room for a detached observer. And this means as well that the paradoxical victory of Christ over death must become our own victory, the source of a joy and a peace that no one can ever take from us.