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*Holidays We can look at ourselves without shame, just as we are, because Jesus of Nazareth was not ashamed to enter our flesh, becoming one of us.*

**CHRISTMAS IS THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE REALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN**  
by **Julián Carrón**

Dear Editor,

Failure, disappointment, defeated attempts. One's lack of success in life. So often, this is the criterion used to look at a person (at the professional, existential, and emotional level). And so often this becomes the gaze with which one looks at oneself. The result is that sense of feeling ashamed of oneself, behind which are hidden all the human dramas, the wounds and suffering that each person harbors deep within, like a discomfort that sometimes explodes on a personal and a social level.

If a person falls short, if he is not up to the standards of the dominant culture, which imposes success as the criterion for life, he can be discarded. This is what the Pope (including recently, speaking of persons with disabilities and prisoners) has called the "throwaway culture." Unfortunately this culture is triumphing, becoming the common mentality not only externally, but also inside of us.

Amidst all this waste, does something of value remain? Yes, that wounded humanity remains, restless and confused: it is still there, crying out in wait of something to free us from what seems like an inescapable situation. God chooses precisely this human state, which no attempt seems able to alter, to challenge the throwaway culture with the newness of a gaze that illuminates the infinite value of every single man.

In the face of our failures, the words of the prophet Isaiah still apply today: "Raise a glad cry, you barren one" (Is 54:1), that is, you and I, who never manage to live up to the standards. "Fear not, you shall not be put to shame; you need not blush, for you shall not be disgraced" (Is 54:4). This is how God challenges our obstinate habit of looking at ourselves according to our own measure, or that of other people. God is not ashamed of us, of our frailty, of our wounds, of our being tossed by the waves, of the nihilism that Galimberti described in *Corriere della Sera* as a "void of meaning" (September 15, 2019).

How does God issue His challenge? What is the most powerful gesture He makes toward us? He does not offer us words of consolation; He happens in our lives. To help us understand our value, the Word—God, the meaning, origin and destiny of our life—became flesh and came to dwell among us (cf. Jn 1:14). Nothing is more convincing: the Lord of heaven and earth took on our humanity. Because He has become flesh, and remains present through the flesh, through the real humanity of concrete people, He can embrace every human circumstance, enter into every discomfort, every wound and the expectation of every heart. With him, those words first pronounced two thousand years ago continue to resound as living words, which offer the most accurate measure of how great each of us is: "What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life?" (Mt. 16:26). Our "I" is worth more than the whole universe! Fr. Giussani commented on Jesus' questions saying this: "No woman ever heard another voice speak of her son with such an original tenderness and unquestionable valuing of the fruit of her womb, with such a wholly positive affirmation of its destiny; only the voice of the Jew Jesus of Nazareth. And more than that, no man can feel his own dignity and absolute value affirmed far beyond all his achievements. No one in the world has ever been able to speak like this!" (*Generating Traces in the History of the World*, p. ix).

When this gaze that reveals man's full value enters a person's life, it astonishes him, leaving him speechless, and introduces a gaze on himself that would not otherwise be possible. Just as I was

able to verify in the last few days through a letter received from a young woman who is a friend: “The longer I walk under this gaze, the more even all the wounds I have, my littleness, my sorrows, the things I do not understand about myself, the fears, the pettiness, and the sins, become dear to me. I know that they are my only opportunity to intercept the Lord passing by, because they leave me disarmed, needy and small. I am amazed how I no longer want to censor anything about myself; on the contrary, I stubbornly want to look at everything, down to the bottom. My humanity is only dear to me because it is embraced by the Lord who comes.”

I am reminded of an unforgettable page that describes the same encounter with Christ present through the changed humanity of one of his witnesses. “As soon as the Unnamed entered the room, Federigo went to meet him with a calm and friendly expression, and arms outstretched, as if to welcome a guest; [...] ‘there have been many times, over a long period, when I should have come to you.’ ‘Come to me? Do you know who I am? Was my name given to you correctly?’ [...] The Cardinal seized his hand with loving violence saying, ‘Do not prevent me from clasping this hand.’ [...] With these words he put his arms around the neck of the Unnamed, who at first tried to draw away, and resisted for a moment; but then he seemed to be overcome by that impulse of divine charity and threw his arms around the Cardinal. [...] The Unnamed freed himself from that embrace [...] and said ‘O truly great and truly merciful God! Now I know myself, now I understand what I am!’” (*The Betrothed*). The most interesting part is that the experience Manzoni describes the Unnamed having is within reach for everyone; we see it happening again in people like that young woman.

This is the “good news” that Christmas brings to us. Not just nice words, but the encounter with a fleshy, human reality that challenges the advance of nothingness and allows you to look at all of yourself, just as you are, without shame, because Jesus of Nazareth was not ashamed to enter our flesh by becoming man. Christmas is that baby in swaddling clothes who asks us: “Why don’t you look at yourself as I look at you, as I look at your humanity? Don’t you realize that I became a child just to show you all the preference I have for you?”

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