

Easter 6 9<sup>th</sup> May 2021

John 16:16-24

Contemplatio: Michael Wood

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### **Becoming a human being**

This reading today is within the same three chapters which we listened to last week – a section commonly called ‘The Farewell Discourse’.

Why in this Easter season of Resurrection are we listening to a reading which might all sound rather depressing and morbid, with Jesus pointing towards his death? Tonight I want to share with you some new insights I came across recently into some symbolism in John which I had been unaware of before....which is absolutely fascinating in helping us to understand what John is saying about Jesus, the gospel and what it means to be a human being.

Jesus is responding to the disciples’ confusion. They have asked (paraphrasing here), ‘what on earth is Jesus talking about when he says that we won’t see him, and then we’ll see him again?’. And Jesus throws in this very curious little analogy about a woman giving birth which I’ll throw up on the screen:

Amen Amen [which mean, [pay attention]...I tell you that you will weep and will lament, and the cosmos [world] will rejoice [because the world thinks it has killed off the trouble maker]; you will feel **anguish** but your **anguish** will become joy.

The WOMAN, when she is giving birth, feels **anguish** because her hour has come; but when she produces the child, she no longer remembers the suffering on account of the joy that a human being [Anthropos] has been born into the cosmos.

And so now indeed you feel **anguish**; but I shall see you again, and your heart will rejoice, and no one takes your joy away from you.

Who is the woman Jesus is talking about and what is the *significance* of this woman giving birth? Well, it’s *very* significant. To see the significance we need to ask where in John’s gospel do three phrases show up together.

### **John 2:21 A wedding feast in Cana of Galilee**

[where Jesus’ mother tells Jesus there is no wine] “**Woman, what is this to me and you? My hour is not yet arrived**” (remembering that in John’s gospel ‘hour’ refers to the hour of Jesus death)

### **John 4:21 Talking to a Samaritan Woman by a well**

“Trust me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” [context is Jesus promising ‘living water’]

### **John 16:21 Farewell discourse**

The woman, when she is giving birth, feels **anguish** because **her hour has come**... she no longer remembers the suffering on account of the joy that a human being [Anthropos] has been born.

[why would a woman feel 'anguish'? when giving birth? Pain, yes! Anguish?

[who is being given birth to?].....an Anthropos....a human being.

### **John 19:5 Jesus parading Jesus before the crowd**

"Behold the Anthropos" [the human]

### **John 19: 30 Jesus last words on cross**

**"it is finished"**

*What is finished? God's work of 'making a human being'!*

*We are reminded of Genesis 1:26 where God says:*

**"Let us make a human [Adam] in our image".**

**God's work of making the true human being (in whose image 'Adam' is made) is completed on the cross and when we die with Christ we are BORN into life. Yes, there is 'anguish' and yes there is 'joy'.**

*[this exegesis comes from Fr John Behr]*

This is the extraordinary point being made in John's gospel – that when we say we are made 'in the image of God', we are saying that we are made in the image of a crucified God. We are made in the image of Christ crucified. The crucified Christ is the template of the true human and it is as if we are stamped from this template. To become a human being is to live into our death as Jesus does – out of love for others. It is a journey of descent before ascent. At the moment of voluntarily giving up our lives into God is the moment of our birth.

I'll finish with an extraordinary insight into this, which was also drawn to my attention by John Behr...from the letter of St Ignatius of Antioch to the Romans. Ignatius was Bishop of Antioch. This was early 2<sup>nd</sup> century. Ignatius had been a disciple of Polycarp and Polycarp was a disciple of John – so this is VERY early – within living memory of Jesus and John. Like quite a few of the early Christians, Ignatius is being walked off to Rome to be martyred, and while he's going he writes a letter to the Christians in Rome (it's quite a short letter and you can find it on the web). In this letter,

Ignatius BEGS the Christians in Rome to not intervene with the authorities to stop his Martydom (witness to Christ).

He says...."I have no use for the delights of this world and all its kingdoms. I would prefer dying in Jesus Christ to ruling over all the earth. I seek him who died for us; I desire him who rose for our sake. **I am about to be born again.** Understand me, my brothers; **do not hinder me from coming to life, do not wish me to die [that is, by remaining in this world].** I desire to belong to God, not to the world. Do not seduce me with perishable things. Let me see the pure light; when I am there, **I shall be truly a man at last.** Allow me to imitate the sufferings of my God".

The word Marty means 'witness'. We witness to Christ through the pattern of our lives – patterning our lives on cross of Christ – giving our own lives to others. This is what it means to be a human being.