

*Thursday 4 September 2014*

First reflection: *'Departure' (Acts 1: 1-11)*

The Evangelist Luke (the author) is fundamentally rather like us. He has two problems.

- He has not seen Jesus – none of us have seen him – and has not even seen those who have seen him. He turns therefore to the third generation who not only, like him, have not seen Jesus but have not even seen those who saw him because the eyewitnesses are dead.

Thus, like us, he addresses the problem of how to conserve the memory of Jesus, so as not to lose it, because if we lose Jesus in his historicity, we lose everything.

- Then there is another problem. Jesus said that he would soon return. But time passes and he does not return. Perhaps, therefore, the problem is that the 'soon' of God is not like our 'soon'. And thus he says: what does his delay in returning mean? What should be done in the meantime? How should daily life be lived?

To sum up: there are these two problems.

- ✓ How to accede to a past that is increasingly remote.
- ✓ And how to proceed towards a future that seems increasingly long and far off, because it is not known when he will return.

In the Acts of the apostles we are told how Theophilus is called to respond to God's love for man.

Love creates a response and makes us similar to he whom we love. Jesus is the *first Word* and to the extent that we 'know' it and 'love' it, that Word becomes our life. We love as we are loved. The Acts are the 'consequence' of, the reaction to, this experience of lived love.

The true instruction of Jesus takes place through the Holy Spirit who is the Love between the Father and the Son and is the Love that the Son has given to us, and it is that Love that we see on the Cross; thus we feel loved, thus we begin to love.

If we feel loved and begin to love, we can understand the *teaching*, we can bear its weight (those who do not love do not understand), we can bear the weight of reality and understand things which we previously did not understand, but above all we live them.

The protagonist will always be this – ineffable – Holy Spirit; but the Spirit, who is always invisible, is the most visible thing. The Spirit is life, he is air. The Spirit can be seen from what he moves, and what is the spirit of God?: 'love, joy, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control' (Gal 5:22). These are the fruits of the Spirit. And it is by fruits that you recognise and we are recognised.

His work is 'to draw near'. It is there that he follows us, he is near to us. When, however, we *recognise* him and love him, he is no longer near, he is no longer close to us – he is 'in' us. During the public life of Jesus, the Kingdom of God, which is him, was amongst us, *close* to us. After his resurrection, when we love him, he is no longer near us, close to us, amongst us, he is 'in' us, because we have his spirit and thus we can continue to do and say what he did and said.

Thus this constant *drawing near* never abandons us. It is always our companion: wherever we go, in whatever difficulty we find ourselves, in whatever woe we enter, in whatever negative thing we do, he comes close to us. There is a very fine prayer of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, from prison, which says (it is a morning prayer), addressing God, 'Everything is dark inside me, but you are the light, I am alone, but you do not leave me'. And then at the end it says: 'I do not understand your roads, but you understand mine'.