

JESUS THE TEACHER (1/2)

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A consideration of Jesus as teacher is a great help in unfolding the richness of the charism of teaching. It is useful for educators to distinguish in the person of Jesus the role of teacher from his other roles which also derive from his basic mission as the Messiah, the Son of God (Mk 1:1), such as those of prophet, evangeliser, catechist and healer who confronts hunger and illness (Mt 9: 35; 23, 34). All of these roles enrich his charism as the incomparable teacher.

Saint John Baptist de La Salle, proclaimed Patron of Teachers by Pius XII on May 15th 1950, in his *Meditations for the Time of Retreat* (1), besides contemplating Jesus in the gospels in order to understand better the apostolate, tries to interiorise the material through questions. We shall likewise use questions here, at the end of each paragraph. Each of these, in turn, can provoke other questions.

What is inimitable in Jesus the Teacher

Jesus of Nazareth is so astonishing that Nathaniel can say nothing other than: "Master, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel" (Jn 1: 49). He is Master as a consequence of something much greater, which he summarises in declaring: "I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark; he will have the light of life" (Jn 8: 12). He teaches with divine authority (Mt 7: 28f; 28: 18) and with total certitude (Mt 24: 35). He corrects the ancient biblical teachings by saying: "You have learnt how it was said to your ancestors, but I say this to you" (Mt 5: 21f, 27f, 31f, 33f, 38f, 43f). He supports his teaching by such divine gestures as his dominion over nature, his healing miracles and his discernment of the inner thoughts of people (Jn 2: 24f; 4: 29f, 39; 6: 16-26).

Jesus says that we must not call ourselves master or guide, for he is our unique master and all of the others are human (Mt 23: 8, 10). Nevertheless, he sends into the world persons whom he calls as teachers to continue his work (Mt 23: 34). He asks every one of these teachers to be a disciple of the kingdom of heaven, bringing forth things both new and old (Mt 13: 52). A disciple from whatever population, such as Ananias, can be called to initiate into the truth a Saul of Tarsus, called to be apostle to the nations (Ac 9: 10-20). Jesus hopes that a well-formed disciple will be like his Master (Lk 6: 40). *Do we consider ourselves as teachers having the same attitudes as disciples of the one Master, Jesus? Do we*

respect in our students the vocation that they might not yet themselves realise? Do we approach Jesus in our students?

His preparation

"When he started to teach, Jesus was about thirty years old" (Lk 3: 23). His neighbours wondered at his wisdom when he began to teach, because they knew his family well and his work as a carpenter (Mk 6: 2f). He had not studied much (Jn 7: 14f) nor travelled except where it was customary among his people, but he was the object of much interest (Lk 2:45-47). He prepared himself by "increasing in wisdom, in stature and in favour with God and men" (Lk 2: 52) in situations common to the time. He experienced the poverty of being born in a stable (Lk 2: 7), suffered persecution and exile (Mt 2: 13), knew familiar joys ((Lk 2: 10-20; Mt 2: 10f) and conflicts (Lk 2: 46-50). He grew up subject to his parents (Lk 2: 51) and to God (Lk 2: 40) in a locale totally without fame (Jn 1: 45f). He was sensitive to the point of tears (Jn 11: 33-36), dejection (Jn 12: 27), dread, sorrow and anguish (Mk 14: 33f). *Do we prepare our teaching so as to please God in everything and to serve others?*

After his public manifestation, through baptism, of his mission (Lk 3: 21f), Jesus endured in the desert a time of testing, fasting and communion with the Holy Spirit (Lk 3: 1f). He frequently reserved time for praying alone (Mk 1: 35-37; 6: 46; Lk 3: 21; 5: 16; 6: 12; 9: 18, 28-36; 11: 1-12, 39-46). *With what proximate spiritual preparation do we teach? Do we entrust ourselves each time to the Holy Spirit?*

His use of authority

Jesus the Teacher knows from whence he came and where he is going (Jn 8: 14); he is determined to obey and to please God his Father (Jn 8: 28f) and thereby be one with God (Jn 8: 47). He serves God and the truth (Jn 5: 30-38). *Do we exercise our authority as servants of God?*

Jesus considers authority as service (Mt 20: 27f). He can forgive rebellion against him as man, but not defiance of the Spirit of God and of truth (Mt 12: 31f). He refuses to intervene in matters which do not concern him (Lk 12: 13f). He insists that little children (Lk 18: 15f) and people in need (Lk 18: 35-43) not be hindered from reaching him. He is the servant who gives his life for his disciples, in order to demonstrate God's love for the world (Jn 10: 14-18). *Do we teach in order to serve the needy or to be served ourselves? Is our teaching motivated by love?*

Jesus the Teacher does not monopolise authority at the expense of others, such as the priests who must certify the cure of lepers (Mt 8: 4), the teachers of the law (Mt 23: 1-3), John the Baptist (Mt 11: 11) and other disciples who work for good but are not among his adherents (Lk 9: 49f). *Do we provoke useless conflicts over authority? Is the general good our standard for exercising authority? Do we approve of the good done by those who are not members of our own group?*

Jesus the Teacher rejects harmful influences by reaffirming basic principles (Mt 20: 20-23; 22: 16) and the priority of his mission (Lk 8: 19-21; 19: 36-40). He accepts reasonable and just requests (Lk 7: 1-6), the intercession of his mother (Jn 2: 1-11) and of his friends (Jn 12: 20-30), including insistence when the motives are just (Lk 5: 17-20). *Do we listen with discernment to the suggestions of others? Do we at times abuse our authority?*

His inculturation of his teaching

Jesus incarnates his teaching within the culture of his listeners, appealing to their common observations of nature: the rebirth of springtime (Mt 24: 32), healthy and diseased trees (Mt 12: 33), sowing and harvesting (Mt 13: 3-8), birds' nests (Mt 13: 32), sunshine (Mt 13: 43), the ominous red sky (Mt 16: 2f) and other climatic signs (Lk 12: 54-56). *Are we sensitive to the beauty and the care of nature? Do we incorporate in our teaching our own observations of daily life?*

Jesus the Teacher includes social customs and situations as examples: children playing in the marketplace (Mt 11: 16-19), capricious sons (Mt 21: 28-31), young libertines who leave home (Lk 15: 3), thieves at work (Mt 12: 29), healthy hands, feet and eyes (Mt 18: 8f), clean cups, inside and out (Mt 23: 25f), discharge of sewage (Mt 15: 17f), whitening of sepulchres (Mt 23: 27), proper attention to guests (Lk 7: 44-46), gala reunions (Lk 15: 22), organisation of feasts (Lk 15: 23-25), social etiquette at banquets (Mt 22: 1-14), prudent behaviour of guests (Lk 14: 8-11), preparations by women in the retinue (Mt 25: 1-13), social insensitivity of the rich (Lk 16: 19-21), circumstances that lead to divorce (Mt 19: 3), repentant prostitutes (Mt 21: 32), dealing with officials (Lk 18: 2-5) and solitude of the sick and prisoners (Mt 25: 36, 43). *Do we incarnate our teaching in reality or do we avoid it?*

Jesus the Teacher makes reference in his teaching to commercial activities: baking bread (Mt 13: 33), repairing garments (Mt 9: 16), pouring wine into skins (Lk 5: 37-39), fertilising fruit trees (Lk 13: 6-8), pruning for a better harvest (Jn 15: 2), building a foundation (Lk 6: 47-49), taking inventory of household goods (Mt 13: 52), sweeping the house to find a coin (Lk 15: 8), selecting merchandise (Mt 13: 47f), idleness and employment among daily labourers (Mt 20: 1-7), double employment (Mt 16: 13), feeding animals compared with feeding workers (Lk 15: 15f), promoting productive employees (Mt 24: 46f), punishing lazy workers (Lk 12: 47f), effective and negligent administration of personnel (Mt 24: 46-51) and of goods (Mt 25: 14-26), honest moneylenders (Lk 7: 41-43) and supervisors (Mt 20: 13-15), dishonest stewards (Lk 16: 1-11), leasing fields (Mt 21: 33-41), calculating a budget (Lk 14: 28-30), unfair rivalry between farmers (Mt 13: 24-28), advantages of alternative investments (Mt 13: 44-46), buried treasure (Mt 13: 44; Mt 25: 24-26), bank deposits (Mt 25: 27), penalty of imprisonment for debtors (Mt 18: 30), slavery (Mt 18: 25; 20: 27) and exploitation (Mt 20: 25). *Do we pay attention or not to the financial and administrative aspects of daily life and of education?*

Jesus the Teacher takes religious and cultural practices as his theme: communication within the family of pleasant events (Mk 5: 18f), greater urgency for saving a life than for obeying a law (Mt 12: 9-12), the urge to share good news (Lk 15: 4-6, 8f), preference for one's own over strangers (Mk 7: 27), insistence on seeing miracles (Mt 12: 38-40; 16: 1-4), visible almsgiving (Mt 6: 2), ostentatious praying (Mt 6: 5) and religion that is totally exterior (Mt 15: 1-9). *Do we relate our teaching with the local customs that we observe?*

Jesus the Teacher draws examples from political life: opposition to the ruler (Lk 19: 15-27), tyranny (Mt 20: 25), punishment as retaliation (Mt 22: 7), civil war (Mt 12: 25) and diplomatic negotiation (Lk 14: 31f). He knows when to deny respect to unworthy authorities (Lk 13: 31f; 23: 8-11). He points out to his accusers the proper procedure for

conducting an investigation (Jn 18: 19-21) and for defending one's rights (Jn 18: 22f). He holds the unjust ruler responsible (Jn 18: 33-36; 19: 1-11). *In our teaching do we show an interest in the common good, both local and national? Do we awaken a critical attitude toward the positive and negative aspects of public affairs?*

His questioning of mentalities and cultures

Jesus the Teacher questions mentalities and cultures according to their conformity with the mind of God (Mt 16: 23). He censures whoever does not accept suffering as part of God's plan (Mt 16: 21-24). He respects the laws of Israel but also brings them to their fulfilment (Mt 5: 17-19). He counters religious pride with humility (Lk 18: 10-14), strict observance with mercy (Mt 9: 11-13) and changes a religion of sadness into one of joy in being with God (Mt 9: 15). He criticises the teachers of the law for burdening their followers without themselves bearing any inconvenience (Mt 23: 4). He surmounts external traditions in favour of acceptance of the will of God (Mt 16: 1-20). He confronts popular beliefs with divine revelation (Mt 16: 13-17). He disqualifies the authenticity of any group that does not concur with the love of God (Mt 15: 12f). He criticises the various functionaries who disregard the needs of the people (Lk 10: 30-32). He warns against the devious teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees (Mt 16: 5-12). *Do we confront with the gospel our own mentality and the attitudes of others?*

His total concentration on God

Jesus the Teacher centres his instruction on union with God. He endorses the list of commandments, culminating in obedience to parents and the Golden Rule (Mt 19: 18f) and sums them up in the love of God and of neighbour (Mt 22: 34-40). He subordinates law to mercy, with respect to both persons and animals (Mt 12: 1-13), and work done for others in relation to personal union with God (Mt 26: 6-13). He urges an improvement in inner dispositions as well as in outward conduct (Mt 5: 28). He invites a generous service of God to take the place of obligation (Mt 19: 16-21). He identifies happiness with the kingdom of God (Mt 5: 3-12; 6: 33). He changes the concept of power as privilege to that of authority for the purpose of disinterested service (Lk 20: 20-28). He warns the rich that their mentality poses a danger to their salvation (Mt 19: 23-26). He submits everyone's conduct to the Last Judgement of God (Mt 16: 27). He teaches us to live always prepared for the final encounter with God (Mt 24: 42-44). People admire him, saying "He has done all things well" (Mk 7: 37), but he says, "No one is good but God alone" (Mk 10: 18). *Do we make all our decisions with God in view? Do we motivate our students' conduct by the love of God and of neighbour?*

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(1) *Meditations for the Time of Retreat. For the use of all persons who are engaged in the education of youth, and particularly for the retreat which the Brothers of the Christian Schools make during vacation.* John Baptist de La Salle, Doctor of Theology, Founder of the Brothers of the Christian Schools. (A) Translated and edited by W. J. Battersby, Ph.D., in De La Salle; *Meditations*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1953. (B) Translated by Brother Augustine Loes, FSC, with an Introduction by Brother Miguel Campos, FSC. Winona: Christian Brothers Conference, 1975. LASE - 294.