

What Did Christ Teach?

- 514 In a sense, there's a lot we don't know
about Jesus of Nazareth.
The Gospels are not a biographical account,
and even if they were,
they omit many years of Jesus' life.
And in the years they do cover,
they miss many details.
We are curious about this because of the importance
we attach to Jesus,
but we will never really know a lot about him.
- 515 What we do know is found mainly in the Gospels.
The writers of these Gospels
took great pains to make sure that we,
the readers,
would grasp the greater reality
behind their accounts.
The Gospels are full of symbols, therefore,
such as the swaddling clothes at his birth,
the journey to Jerusalem he undertook,
and the bread and wine of that last supper.
The writers were people of faith,
first and foremost,
eager to share what they had heard and seen.
Looking back at his life
some thirty or forty years later,
which is when most of these Gospels were written,
the writers were able
to understand him more clearly
than at the time of his death.
Distance from a profound event
gives us perspective.

To them, his humanity was a sacrament:
a sign of his divinity,
a sign of salvation.

516

“Whoever has seen me,” Jesus once said,
“has seen the Father.”

Every aspect of Jesus’ life was a revelation:
whether words
or deeds
or prayer
or feasting
or resting in silence...

517-19

In the end, his whole life was
about the Paschal Mystery.

He committed himself in love to us,
to those around him,
especially to the poor and rejected,
and from that love,
all who knew him experienced freedom.

The goal of his ministry
was to restore to the human race
the possibility of “living in Paradise.”

It isn’t so much that the Father was demanding
the bloody sacrifice of his own Son
to be appeased for our wrongdoing.

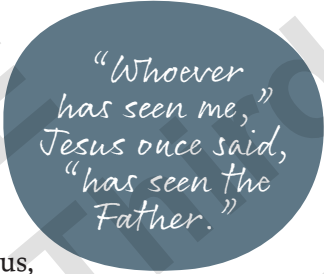
That sounds like the gods
of the ancients
but not the God of Jesus.

It is more likely this:

that we were created for love,
which entails an inevitable dying to self,
a giving away, as it were, of oneself
and willing cooperation with God’s will.

But we had lost our way.

In the grand cosmic scheme of things,
the human race had lost sight
of the reign of God.



“Whoever
has seen me,”
Jesus once said,
“has seen the
Father.”

By his actions on the cross,
his tremendous act of love and forgiveness,
Christ reopened for us
a spiritual way that had been closed.
He announced the reign of God to us
and, through this act,
along with all the works and teachings
throughout his lifetime,
restored us to the pathways of love.
We have a name for this central mystery
of Christ's life and work.
We refer to it as "the Paschal Mystery."
By it, we refer to his self-giving love.

Example

- 520 Christ provides an example for us,
a model of how to live the Paschal Mystery.
We are invited to follow him,
take up our own cross, as it were,
and become humble as he did,
become poor as he did,
and die to ourselves as he did,
- 521 By his grace, and his grace alone,
we can live as he did
to become members of his body.

The Long Wait

- 522 When we speak of God's Son
"coming to earth from heaven,"
we do not mean to suggest
that he came to earth
from some other physical place,
like from another planet
or another country.



God is pure spirit, supernatural.
We use our feeble language
to express a much greater truth.
Throughout the centuries of the human race,
we waited, and God promised.
Promised what?
Promised that love would return,
that fully human life would be possible.
All through this time,
God was preparing us
to receive this “bursting forth” of divine love,
which would occur in Jesus.
In the birth of Jesus of Nazareth
to that humble and willing woman
and to her loving husband—
not as a whirlwind,
not as an earthquake,
not as a great fire,
but in a child’s cry—
it was realized.
What all the prophets had foretold
was now reality.

523 John the Baptist was the last of those prophets,
only a few months older than Jesus himself.
He brings the period of waiting to a conclusion
and helps us “prepare the way of the Lord.”

524 During Advent each year,
we revisit that long period of waiting
for Christ to appear
and the energy of love to be restored.

The Christmas Mystery

525 Jesus was born into poverty,
into a family that could not find lodging
on a cold Middle Eastern winter night.
The cry of a child.



526 And we, too, it seems,
must become childlike in order
to enter the reign of God.
For only when Christ is born in us
will the mystery of Christmas be achieved.

The Infancy

527 He was a Jew
and remained one throughout his life.
He was circumcised in the Jewish ceremony
529 and then presented in the Temple,
as any firstborn son would be.
528 Later, there was a mysterious moment
in his childhood,
one retold in the Gospel of Matthew.
Certain men or women of great wisdom,
called in the text of Matthew “magi,”
who were wisdom figures from the East,
came in faith to welcome Christ
and to celebrate this mystery.
They were not Jews, so the message was clear:
God welcomes all to know Christ.
We call the feast which commemorates this event
“the Epiphany,”
which means “God makes an appearance!”

GROUP OR PERSONAL PROCESS

How do you live the Paschal Mystery in your own life?

In other words, how do you practice self-giving love for the good of others?

How do you “die in Christ”? What experiences of “new life” have you had?

How do you address Jesus in prayer? What is the nature of your relationship with him when you turn to him in your quiet and prayerful moments?