

## **LAUGH WITH JESUS LAUGHING**

**Fr. Varghese Paul, S.J.**

I received a letter from one of my readers in far away Kutch by name Jigar J. Acharya. He raised a question which puzzled him: “Father Varghese, an intriguing question often comes to my mind. I have not seen anywhere a happy-looking picture of Jesus. All the pictures, which I have seen, look that Jesus was fed up with people and life. Could you please explain why all pictures of Jesus are looking sad and depressing?”

After receiving Jigarbhai’s letter I spoke to a few of my friends about it. I was surprised that some friends were also holding the opinions similar to Jigarbhai. A friend said that in many pictures and statues seen in Christian homes and churches Jesus looked sad and depressing!

I have seen innumerable pictures of Jesus in India and in many other countries. So I have to acknowledge that in a lot of pictures Jesus really looks unhappy and very serious. But certainly all the pictures do not show that “Jesus was fed up with people and life” as Jigarbhai has said in his letter.

While I was studying in Rome I spent two months in Florence in Italy during the summer vacation in 1976. Then, one day I went to visit Milan, not too far from Florence and even today I remember a picture of Jesus which I saw in the Cathedral Church of Milan. In it Jesus’ face is looking very majestic and captivating. There is a famous story behind the picture which is drawn by the well known artist Leonardo da Vinci.

The Archbishop of the Cathedral entrusted the artist Leonardo da Vinci to draw a picture of Jesus and his disciples at Last Supper on a marble wall of the Cathedral Church. Da Vinci with much prayer and fasting took up the task of creating the picture of Jesus and his disciples at supper. First of all, he drew the picture of the room where Jesus and his disciples took the Last Supper. While drawing the room of the Last Supper the creativity of the artist began to blossom.

Then he drew beautiful pictures of the twelve disciples at supper with Jesus. In it the disciples, fascinated by the luminous face of their ‘Guru’, are shown talking a low voice.

At the end of three long years of creative drawing Leonardo drew an impressive face of Jesus with eyes oozing out love and mercy. Jesus’ face showed like a river of love and mercy overflowing on both banks! When the picture was complete the artist was extremely happy with his creation. He then brought a friend to the Cathedral of Milan to see his creation.

His friend watched and inspected the picture of Last Supper for a long time. The friend liked the whole picture. Then, he exclaimed, “How beautiful is the picture of the wine glass in the hand of Jesus?” Immediately Leonardo took a brush and mixed some colours and wiped out the wine glass from the hand of Jesus. Seeing that his friend was flabbergasted by his action the artist peacefully told him, “Brother, there is no need to be surprised. In my picture there should not be anything more beautiful and noble than Lord Jesus. That is why I wiped out the wine glass which you found most beautiful.”

The Last Supper scene drawn by Leonardo da Vinci is so beautiful and widely acclaimed that people around the world frame the picture and hang it in their dining rooms. In that picture no one can say that Jesus looks sad and unhappy. On the contrary, in the agape meal with his friends the happy face of Jesus exudes/exhibits love and joy.

My office displays two pictures of Jesus. Both the pictures look quite different from one-another and are drawn by two different artists. Both the pictures display the loving personality of Jesus because of his eyes and face luminous with love and mercy. In fact, I like one of them so much that I have printed many copies of it and I send to people who ask for a picture of Jesus.

Seeing some pictures of Jesus Jigarbhai felt that “Jesus was fed up with people and life”. But for the people who know the life and the message of Jesus, there is absolutely no reason to think that Jesus was fed up with people and life. Many artists have drawn the pictures of Jesus as looking depressed, unhappy or serious according to their personal experiences and visions of life. Perhaps the artists, while drawing their pictures, must have considered the great suffering and the infamous death of Jesus on a cross like a common criminal.

On the day before his death Jesus, as his custom was, went to the Mount of Olives and prayed on his knees. Describing that scene in the Bible one of the Evangelists, Luke says, “In great anguish he prayed even more fervently; his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.” The unimaginable pain and immense sufferings, which Jesus endured on the Cross, are in the minds of all artists drawing the pictures of Jesus. Hence, I believe, some artists must have drawn pictures of Jesus as looking sad and depressed.

But there is no solid reason to believe as Jigarbhai says that “Jesus was fed up with people and life”. On the contrary, if we examine the whole life of Jesus we can know for sure that Jesus lived on this earth as a very social and happy person. If for centuries some artists have drawn Jesus’ pictures as looking sad and depressing, we can also see some pictures of Jesus smiling and laughing. As I write this, in front of me on the table is a fortnightly magazine published from Chennai, ‘NEW LEADER’ with a picture of Jesus smiling. The face in the picture exhibits joy and happiness in meeting a person in front.

In that smiling picture Jesus looks like an ordinary person like you and me. Examining the life of Jesus we know that he lived on earth as a complete human person. So I prefer to imagine Jesus laughing or crying like an ordinary man. Every person can laugh and does laugh. So we can believe that like any other person Jesus during his life on earth laughed and smiled a lot.

If we study certain passages in the Gospels we can know that on some occasions Jesus did display his light-heartedness and humourous side. Once religious leaders and lawyers caught a woman in adultery and brought her to Jesus. “Teacher”, they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. In our Law Moses commanded that such a woman must be stoned to death. Now what do you say?”

“Whichever one of you has committed no sin may through the first stone at her,” Jesus said to those leaders of the people, who with stones in their hands, were ready to stone her to death.

After hearing Jesus' judgement, as the Evangelist John narrates, the religious leaders left the scene "one by one, the older ones first". Seeing the people, who came to trap him in the maze of their Law and kill the adulterous woman, leave with bent heads and down-cast eyes in shame, Jesus must have laughed to himself.

In a recent American film entitled "The Passion of the Christ" there is a humorous scene. Jesus as a young carpenter is busy in his work. Then, his mother Mary comes calling him to a meal and gives him a jug of water to wash his hands. Jesus after washing his hands takes a little water in his hand and playfully throws the water on the face of his mother. Thus the story writer of the film portrays Jesus as a humorous person. When a person is happy and is able to laugh, then only a person does such playful acts.

In whatever way the pictures of Jesus looked, I believe that to reveal his true personality, the aspect of love should be there in all the pictures of Jesus. Here we may recall the words of the great emperor Napoleon. "Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I have established big empires. But what is there in the foundation of our empires? It is the strength of army at the foundation of our empires. Only Jesus Christ has established his empire on the foundation of love and at this moment there are crores of people ready to die for the love of him", Napoleon said.

Someone has said that when you laugh the whole world laughs with you. But when you cry, you cry alone. The artists may draw the pictures of Jesus according to their perceptions and visions. But seeing their pictures which may look sad and depressing, we need not feel sad and depressed. Instead with Jesus laughing with his disciples or at other people, we can also join him and laugh. With an inner feeling and perception that I am an individual loved by Jesus, sadness disappears and a smile comes to my lips. (contact the author: [ciss@satyam.net.in](mailto:ciss@satyam.net.in))

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