

To *belong* to a cause is one thing. To be so involved in it that you are *identified* with it is quite another. Your whole life is given to it; if necessary you will sacrifice your life for it. Many will recognise in this description the sort of devotion that married people need to find.

But Jesus is *uniquely* identified with his cause, his message. He *is* that word of God which “never returns to God empty, without carrying out what it was sent to do.” This is because the message of God, the cause of Christ, is a new humanity where the divine life is at one with the human. This is why his life is like a married life. He is identified with the cause of this new kind of humanity *because he himself is already living it*. He could not deny it, even when they say *you are blaspheming*, because to accept that would be to desert his own being, to deny his truth.

We can easily imagine the vital importance of his life of prayer, in which Jesus was free to bathe in the communion with God the Father, which we call the Holy Spirit. With other human beings Jesus had to speak human words, answer human questions, struggle with the limitations of others: their ignorance, their sin. With God the Father he can rest in the total communion of the divine life. He needed to pray alone, so that in the company of others he could hold together the gifts of God and humanity *in which they had yet to believe*.

Isaiah already contemplates this unique vocation when his God tells his Suffering Servant:

*I have appointed you as covenant of the people  
to open the eyes of the blind  
to free captives from prison  
and those who live in darkness from the dungeon*

From this understanding we can deduce two vital things: firstly, the necessity of Jesus’ *death* for his cause. Our human refusal to believe in our salvation is so entrenched in our nature, that he would have to risk his life to break its stranglehold. It’s as if we can’t kill his message if we don’t kill him; and he acknowledges this necessity himself, and in that sense alone he is prepared to die for what he proclaims; the presence of the divine life in him could never appear if he saved himself, like a human being.

Secondly, we can understand the fascination of Jesus, the extraordinary pull he exercises over others. They know instinctively that he himself contains their healing, the answer to all their questions, the peace for which they have always longed; and this awareness steals around them like the exotic perfume chosen by Mary for the amazing evening at Bethany, where a man who has lain in the grave for four days is among those who dine, and Jesus himself is holding in his heart his secret plan of self-sacrifice, the plan of the Father. Few could define the workings of scent upon the human heart. No-one seated at that table could have said precisely why the atmosphere was so unforgettably charged. But this suddenly-shed sensational perfume silences them for a moment, and fills every part of the house. Even as it happens, the harsh, mean voice of treachery is raised, to break in to the communion of near-worship surrounding the Lord; and in that moment we know for certain that the death is coming in all its crudity, to turn this holy week into the ultimate place of sacrifice, with his beloved human body at its heart: the new covenant, in his blood..