

In the Face of Insoluble Problems

Chiara Lubich

Rooted in Scripture, this text is first and foremost a fruit of a lived experience through which Chiara Lubich offers a realistic path forward in facing the countless challenges of today's world. The text is an excerpt from a talk given in Lucerne, Switzerland, in May 1999 on the occasion of the 19th International Congress for the Family entitled The Future Lies in the Family. The complete text of the author's talk can be found in the edited volume, "Essential Writings" (New City Press, Hyde Park, NY, pgs. 185 – 188: <https://www.newcitypress.com>).

Faced with the overwhelming mystery of suffering we often find ourselves lost.

In the Bible we read of a culminating moment of suffering that is expressed with a "Why" cried out to heaven. In the evangelist Matthew's account of Jesus' death, we read: "At about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice ... 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' " (Mt 27:46).

Christ reached that moment passing through a devastating range of sufferings: fear, anguish, betrayal and abandonment by his friends, an unjust and engineered trial, torture, humiliation and then being condemned to death by crucifixion, a form of capital punishment reserved for slaves. Perhaps today we cannot fully grasp how gruesome a death it was, how it attempted to destroy the person totally and all memory of him.

And finally, that unexpected cry, "Why have you forsaken me?" that allows us a glimpse into the drama lived by the God-Man. It is the culminating point of his sufferings, his inner passion, his darkest night. He who had said: "The Father and I are one" lives the tragic experience of disunity, of separation from God. And all of this because, out of love for us, he took upon himself all that is negative, all the sins of humankind.

In his forsakenness, the last and greatest sign of his love, Christ reaches the point of total annihilation of self. He reopens the path to unity for all persons with God and with one another. In that "why," to which he received no answer, every man and woman finds an answer to his or her own cry. Is not the distressed person perhaps similar to him, the lonely, the failure, the condemned? Is not every division within the family and among groups of peoples, a reflection of him? Can we not make out his countenance in those who have lost the sense of who God is and of his design for humanity, in those who no longer believe in love and instead accept whatever surrogate comes their way? There is no human tragedy or failure within a family that is not contained in the night of the God-Man. With his death he has already paid for everything; he signed a blank check capable of containing the suffering and sins of every man and woman that was, that is and that will be.

He is like a divine grain of wheat that decomposes and dies in order to give us back life. In that terrible experience he also reveals to us what it really means to love: to be capable of giving of oneself completely, to make oneself nothing for the others. "The sign of God who annihilates himself," writes von Balthasar, "becoming man and dying in the most complete abandonment, explains why God had accepted ... all of that: revealing himself to be love that knows no limits was part of his very nature."¹

Through that emptiness, that nothingness, grace and the life of God flowed back to humanity. Christ reestablished the unity between God and creation, he restored the design, he made new men and women and therefore new families.

[...] The great event of the suffering and abandonment of the God-Man, can therefore become the reference point and the secret wellspring capable of transforming death into resurrection, shortcomings into opportunities to love and family crisis into stages of growth. How so?

If we look at suffering from a purely human perspective there are two choices: we either end up in an analysis that has no way out, because suffering and love are part of the mystery of human life; or we try to rid ourselves of this uncomfortable obstacle by running in the opposite direction.

But if we believe that behind the events of our lives there is God with his love, and if strengthened by this faith we can recognize in big and small daily sufferings, our own and those of others, a shadow of the crucified and forsaken Christ and our participation in the suffering that redeemed the world, it will be possible to understand the meaning of the most absurd situations and put them in perspective.

In the face of whatever suffering may come our way, big or small, and in the face of contradictions and problems that have no solutions, let's try to enter within ourselves and look head on at the absurdity, injustice, innocent suffering, humiliation, alienation or desperation before us. It is there that we will recognize one of the many countenances of the "Man of Sorrows."

It is our meeting with him, the "divine person" who became an individual without relationships. The God of contemporary humanity that transforms nothingness into being, suffering into love. It will be our "yes" to him and our readiness to love him and welcome him into our lives that will cause our individualistic attitudes to crumble and turn us into new men and women who through love are capable of healing and giving new life to the most desperate situations.

1 H. U. von Balthasar, *Solo l'amore è credibile*, Turin 1991, 143.