Abraham, Lot and Father’s Love
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ABRAHAM
AND GOD’S “JUSTICE”

SODOM AND GOMORRAH

One of the most terrible pages of Scripture that describe God’s punitive justice is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah with the dreadful rain of fire. However, should we call it "punitive justice?"

In reality, if we are able to read these pages with a pure heart, they contain the true face of Mercy, all the vigilant and thoughtful tenderness of our Father in Heaven who "comes down" among His depraved children in an attempt to save them.

Let us read these pages together, placing the reality of evil in those cities, the "cry" that rises from them, God's action and man’s response.

The reality of evil in Sodom

“And there came two angels to Sodom at evening; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing them rose up to meet them; and he
bowed himself with his face toward the ground; and he said, "Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night...". And he pressed upon them greatly; and they entered into his house (...). But before they lay down, the men of the city, even the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter. And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, "Where are the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them!".

(Gen 19:1-5)

There is great evil in Sodom. Scripture presents us with an exceptional case of collective depravation that involves an entire city, "both young and old". We are at the paroxysm of an immoral situation that becomes dangerous for others too.

There is great evil in Sodom, but we shouldn’t be scandalized and make harsh remarks about our brothers who lived during that time: Aids, which today is humiliating all humanity, organized drug trafficking, the innumerable social injustices, the vulgarity of television and the press, and many other bad things, advise us not to pass judgments. Rather, they remind us that man, poor man, today as in the past, is unfaithful to himself and his own dignity, just as God is faithful to His Love and His Mercy.

There is evil in Sodom: it is a tumour which, if not removed or healed, will spread inexorably; it has already contaminated Gomorrah and the other towns nearby. Our Father, who cares for all men, must intervene now that all limits have been exceeded, precisely because of His Love for His children. The tumour that has deeply pervaded Sodom can be surgically removed, in a radical way; but the Father, who is infinite tenderness, always tries to avoid traumatic remedies: if He is forced to use drastic measures, it is because His children haven’t given Him the chance to adopt other solutions, as we will see later.

The "cry" against Sodom

"The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous"

(Gen 18, 20)

What is this cry? And who raises it?
It is certainly not a cry that implores forgiveness or that asks for God’s intervention in times of need, as occurred in other occasions in Scripture. It is not a cry
that arises from the contrite heart of someone who has acknowledged his sin: the Sodomites’ souls are shrouded in a deep spiritual cloud and are far from acknowledging their own sins. See how they respond to poor Lot who goes out to meet them in an attempt to make them desist from their evil intentions by offering his two daughters to their foolish desires in order to save the guests, who were considered more sacred and inviolable than any other value:

"I beg you, my brothers, not to do this wicked thing!" Lot told them. "Stand back! – his fellow citizens replied - Now we will treat you worse than them!"

(Gen 19:7 foll.)

The "cry" that forces God to intervene is unfortunately a cry against Sodom, it is a cry of condemnation let out by the "accuser" who awaits God’s permission to strike the children he has seduced and lead into evil:

"Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, while Satan stood at his right hand to accuse him". (Zech 3:1)

"...the accuser of our brothers is cast out, who accuses them before our God day and night".

(Rev 12:10)

Satan knows he has the right to destroy the victims who incautiously - but freely – have allowed themselves to be ensnared by him.

The Father cannot ignore this accusation which He knows is true and He decides to come down among His children in a final attempt to save them.

**God's intervention**

"I must go down and see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me: I mean to find out".

(Gen 18,21)

We feel tenderness for the Father who pretends He doesn’t know what is happening in His earthly family, and who "comes down" - as He did before in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve’s sin (Gen. 3:8) – not to find out if His children have actually committed the sin (He is well aware of it!) but to try to save them from the serious consequences of their sins. He must intervene because "the cry is too great" and He cannot continue to wait patiently as He always does when we make mistakes.

His intervention is merciful, because He is the Father of mercy, however in order to be able to accomplish His
plan of salvation towards His children immersed in sin, the Father needs someone on earth who may be His legal contact, thus becoming a mediator and interceding for everyone.

He cannot search for this ally among the Sodomites, who have become deaf and blind to every call of the spirit, and so He goes to Abraham - the only just man on earth with whom He can start a dialogue - and explains the situation to him, while showing him all the compassion He has for His depraved children. Abraham perceives the Father’s heartbeats and feels urged to intervene.

While the two angels in human form go toward Sodom to carry out the sentence, the dialogue between God and Abraham begins, a masterpiece of the Holy Spirit who wants to show us the true face of God: a Father who takes no delight in the death of the sinner, but who wants him to turn from his way and live; a Father who loves us beyond our non love; a Father who loves us even if we no longer have His Spirit and have deformed His divine imprint in us; a Father who doesn't want to leave man drowning in the quagmire of his sin, but who wants to release him into the ocean of His Mercy "which is more powerful than evil and sin" (Dives in Mis. VIII,15) which He gives His children also and above all when they have become extreme moral and physical poverty.

Let us together read this dialogue which should be the basis of every prayer we make:

"While the two men walked on farther toward Sodom, the Lord remained standing before Abraham. Then Abraham drew nearer to him and said: "Will you sweep away the innocent with the guilty? Suppose there were fifty innocent people in the city: would you wipe out the place, rather than spare it for the sake of the fifty innocent people within it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to make the innocent die with the guilty, so that the innocent and the guilty would be treated alike! Should not the judge of all the world act with justice?". The Lord replied: "If I find fifty innocent people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake".

(Gen 18, 22-26)

Abraham tested the water, saw that his Lord is willing to negotiate, and then continues the dialogue with a fresh impetus:

"Abraham spoke up again: "See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am but dust and ashes... What if there are five less than fifty innocent people; will you destroy the whole city?" I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there"
He answered. But Abraham persisted, saying: "What if only forty are found there?". He replied: "I will forebear doing it for the sake of the forty". (Gen 18, 27-29)

Abraham exults: his Lord is more compliant than he hoped; but he does not realize that it is precisely his Lord who advises him not to stop the negotiations, because He is the one who has aroused in him the desire to save Sodom.

Abraham attacks one last time:

"Then he said: "Let not my Lord grow impatient if I go on: what if only thirty are found there?" He replied: "I will forebear doing it if I can find but thirty there". Still he went on: "Since I have thus dared to speak to my Lord, what if there are no more than twenty?" He answered: "I will not destroy it for the sake of twenty". But he still persisted: "Please, let not my Lord grow angry if I speak up this last time: what if there are at least ten there?" He replied: "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten".

(Gen 18, 30-32)

In bargaining over mercy, Abraham doesn't dare to go below ten innocent people.

He doesn't know the depths of the Heart of his Lord and he sets a limit to His salvific action. He wasn't aware of what the Lord would later say to Jeremiah:

"Roam the streets of Jerusalem, Look about and observe, Search through her public places to find even one, who lives uprightly and seeks to be faithful, and I will pardon her, says the Lord". (Jer 5, 1)

However, we cannot reproach Abraham for his lack of trust in God’s love, when Peter, who continually saw the incarnate Mercy in action, almost considered it an absurdity to forgive more than seven times (Mt 18,22); and James and John invoked "fire from heaven" to destroy the Samaritans who hadn’t welcomed Jesus (Lk 9:54).

For us men it is difficult to identify ourselves with God who is pure Love: it is easier for us to create a God in our own image and likeness and arrogate the power of revenge and destruction which He doesn't know and doesn't want to know.
In fact, Abraham breaks off the dialogue with his Lord who – no longer pressed by the creature - cannot put His Mercy into action in extremis:

"Then the Lord departed as soon as he had finished speaking with Abraham, and Abraham returned home". (Gen 18, 33)

There were no ten innocent ones, so Abraham stopped interceding before his Lord and "went home."

The Mercy which man didn't know how to invoke walks away, and the Justice which man deserved because of his sins moves forward:

"At the same time the Lord rained down sulphurous fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah". (Gen 19,24)

Summarizing and concluding

God’s extraordinary intervention ("I must go down and see...") begins when evil has reached its climax and is humanly irreversible. This desire to "go down and see" is not motivated by Justice who wants to convict, but by Love who tries to save His children by forgiveness, by an act of total Mercy that may overcome the sin which they committed. However, in order to put His Mercy into action, the Father needs someone on earth who may intercede for his brutalized brothers, thus justifying His intervention of Love. Therefore God comes down to earth to join Abraham in a “face to face battle” (Gen 32); a battle that He wants to lose in order to let Mercy triumph, but which unfortunately Abraham loses because he has placed a limit to the Father’s Love.

If Abraham had lowered the "price" – which he had established! - even more and had said: "For my sake and for the sake of my love, save Sodom and Gomorrah!", God would have had the legal support He had come to seek on earth to stop the intervention of justice requested by the “accuser”, by the public prosecutor of this eternal judgment we are subject to before the throne of God. Because God always says "yes" to Love.

"For the sake of Abraham who loved Him" the Father would have put His Mercy into action: there wouldn’t have been the death sentence of "sulphur and fire", but a sentence of Life with a rain of the Holy Spirit - God's Fire! - that would have pierced the sodomites' souls, allowing them to become aware of
the sins they committed and bringing about in them a radical conversion. The tumour was there, and it had to be removed, but it would have been treated at the root and not eradicated in a violent way.

**Evil in today’s world**

The evil in today’s world is by far greater than the evil that existed at the time of Sodom and Gomorrah. Today God is coming down to earth again “*with power*” (Mt 24,30). Power is the attribute of the Father who comes to accomplish the redemption: “*evil*” must disappear from the face of the earth (Rev 12,10; 20,3). “*Evil*” will disappear. But how?

By a terrible destructive purification in the name of the punitive Justice or by an act of Mercy that embraces and frees everything and everyone? God is always faithful to His Love and therefore He desires the triumph of Mercy, as many signs demonstrate: just think of the Message of Mercy which Sister Faustina Kowalska and Mother Speranza have passed on to today’s Church; just meditate on the Dives in Misericordia that John Paul II gave us.

It is up to us to open or close the heart of Mercy which is offered us. By always keeping in mind that our God is a Daddy who "makes Grace overflow where sin increased” (Rom 5, 20) and who "takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ez 33,11).

Let us try not to make the same error Abraham made, if we can call it an error, and today more than ever let us answer the, "cry” of the "accuser”, uniting our voice to our Holy Father John Paul II:

“... into a cry that implores mercy according to the needs of man in the modern world. May this cry be full of that truth about mercy which has found such rich expression in Sacred Scripture and in Tradition, as also in the authentic life of faith of countless generations of the People of God. With this cry let us, like the sacred writers, call upon the God who cannot despise anything that He has made, the God who is faithful to Himself, to His fatherhood and His love..”

("Dives in Mercy", VIII, 1)
LOT AND THE FATHER’S LOVE

God is Father.
God is my Father.
God is our Father.
God takes no pleasure in the death of the sinner,
   but wants him to turn from his way and live.
God loves me more than I love myself.
God wants to save me
   more than I desire to be saved.
God is not my judge,
   but my advocate.
God works always and in every way
   for my salvation.
God is always on my side.
God is tired of seeing us suffer
   and He comes to free us.
Because God is my Daddy.

When Mother Eugenia told me to reread all of Scripture from a new perspective, in order to discover the Father’s infinite love, I was shocked. She explained that I had to focus especially upon Genesis and Revelation, the first and last books of Scripture.
I obeyed and thus began to read the Bible with a new spirit, starting from a basic principle: “God is Love. If He wrote this Book, it must contain the mystery of His Love, against all appearances!”

Therefore I made the most exciting discovery in the spiritual world: one episode after another, I was convinced and am more and more convinced that God is my Daddy, "full of mercy". All the other attributes don't mean anything to me. It is enough for me to know that He is my "Daddy" and that He is "mine."

But this discovery is too beautiful to be kept to myself, because He is the Daddy of all men, even those who don't even know He exists. And I would like to shout to everyone: "Be joyful! God is your Daddy! He can solve all your problems. He wants to help you, He wants to save you! Go to Him, do not be afraid!”. I strive to do so, but I realize that I can only stutter; it is not easy to put an interior certainty into words.

I have dwelt upon the more "catastrophic" episodes: the expulsion from Eden, the universal flood, Sodom and Gomorrah... Especially in these latter pages, which are presented as the most terrible example of God’s "justice", I found instead the key to His tenderness and mercy which go beyond evil, involving Lot too, Abraham’s nephew, in the extreme attempt to save that depraved world. Let us relate this to what we already wrote about Abraham, in order to then make a few remarks about his nephew Lot, who at the time of the separation with his uncle had settled in Sodom:

"Then Abram went as the Lord directed him, and Lot went with him... The land could not support them if they stayed together, because their possessions were so great that they could not dwell together. There were quarrels between the herdsmen of Abram’s livestock and those of Lot’s... Abram said to Lot: "Let there be no strife between you and me... separate from me... If you prefer the left, I will go to the right...". Lot looked about and saw how well watered the whole Jordan Plain was – before the Lord had destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah -; it was like the Lord’s own garden, or like Egypt, as far as Zoar... Lot chose for himself the whole Jordan Plain... Abram stayed in the land of Canaan and Lot settled among the cities of the Plain, pitching his tents near Sodom. Now the inhabitants of Sodom were very wicked in the sins they committed against the Lord”. (Gen 12-13)
Abram begins his great adventure of the spirit, in a troubled journey during which he will prove to be a valiant warrior; he will become the father of Ishmael; he will establish the great covenant with God and will have the promise of his son Isaac...; Lot, attracted by immediate and easy wealth, will go from a nomadic life to a more comfortable and sedentary life, by settling within the walls of Sodom.

We find Abram and Lot again at the time of the great purification, united in the great plan of Mercy of the Father who asks for their support to try to save whatever can be saved:

"(Abraham) looked up and saw three men standing nearby... the men set out from there and looked down toward Sodom; Abraham was walking with them to see them on their way. The Lord reflected: "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do... Then the Lord said: "The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grave that I must go down and see whether or not their actions fully correspond to the cry against them that comes to me; I mean to find out!". While the two men walked on farther toward Sodom, the Lord remained standing before Abraham".

(Gen18,2; 16-22)

Many Fathers have seen in these three men Abraham addresses in the singular the announcement of the mystery of the Trinity, whose full revelation was reserved for the New Testament.

It is important to note that, in speaking of the three divine Persons, Scripture in this case uses the words "Lord", "men" and "angels" without distinction; the substance doesn't change: it is always the same Trinitarian Love that bends down to us with infinite care in order to get us out of the trouble we got ourselves in.

Therefore the three divine Persons come down to earth in one of the most dramatic moments of history. Their intention is to save men in extremis, and the three Persons split up the task: one of them begins the difficult and unsuccessful negotiation with Abraham to save everything and everyone; the other two go to Sodom and Gomorrah with the official motivation "to go down and see" what the situation is like, but in reality to play their last card of salvation with Lot.

We know how the Father’s action ended up with Abraham who, "in bargaining over mercy", didn't dare to go below ten innocent people, who unfortunately couldn't be found. Let us examine what takes place with the other two Persons with Lot:
"The two angels reached Sodom in the evening, while Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he got up to greet them; and bowing down with his face to the ground, he said, "Please, gentlemen, come aside into your servant's house for the night, and bathe your feet; you can get up early to continue your journey." But they replied, "No, we shall pass the night in the town square." He urged them so strongly, however, that they turned aside to his place and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking cakes without leaven, and they dined". (Gen. 19,1-3)

It is interesting to point out that Abraham (Gen 18,2 foll.) as well as Lot, in order for God's action to begin, have to pass the same test of love lived out in its most elementary form: hospitality.

Only by loving can we enter into communion with Love. If man's heart doesn't open up to Love that knocks, God's whole plan of salvation fails.

Let us skip the after-dinner episode and the unsuccessful attempt to involve Lot's son-in-laws and his whole family in the salvation, and let us get to the heart of the flight of Lot and his family:

"As dawn was breaking, the angels urged Lot on, saying, "On your way! Take with you your wife and your two daughters who are here, or you will be swept away in the punishment of the city. When he hesitated, the men, by the LORD'S mercy, seized his hand and the hands of his wife and his two daughters and led them to safety outside the city.

As soon as they had been brought outside, he was told: "Flee for your life! Don't look back or stop anywhere on the Plain. Get off to the hills at once, or you will be swept away." "Oh, no, my lord!" replied Lot. "You have already thought enough of your servant to do me the great kindness of intervening to save my life. But I cannot flee to the hills to keep the disaster from overtaking me, and so I shall die. Look, this town ahead is near enough to escape to. It's only a small place. Let me flee there--it's a small place, isn't it?--that my life may be saved." "Well, then," he replied, "I will also grant you the favour you now ask. I will not overthrow the town you speak of. Hurry, escape there! I cannot do anything until you arrive there." That is why the town is called Zoar. The sun was just rising over the earth
We must meditate on God’s continuous and total availability to any request that is made by His children; on the will of God’s love that always seeks a reason to absolve us. And we must meditate on these words: "Hurry, escape there! I cannot do anything until you arrive there."

Why aren’t we able to interpret, in these strange dialogues, God’s will to save man?

He tried with Abraham, now He tries with Lot. Abraham stopped the action of mercy: he fixed a price, he reduced the price and he gave up. God never stopped saying yes, yes, yes because He never closes His heart to Love. Now He plays His last card with Lot.

What would have happened if Lot had started to cry: "Lord, I have a cramp in my leg... I have a sciatica attack.... I really can’t move anymore... I really can’t..." and sat down on the ground?

If Lot, in other words, had had a sit-in, refusing to get up, what would have become of the sulphurous rain of fire? It wouldn’t have been able to come down, because Lot couldn’t have been involved: "Escape there, because (= otherwise) I cannot do anything..."

as Lot arrived in Zoar; at the same time the LORD rained down sulphurous fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah (from the LORD out of heaven)”.

(Gen 19,15-24)

Lot passed the test of Love by insisting on giving hospitality to the two wayfarers and protecting them from the fury of the Sodomites. In this way he allows Love to take him by the hand, along with his wife and daughters, and flee from the city. God almost uses a "violence" of Love to save those who have remained faithful to Him.

Lot starts to run, but he is old, and soon he is forced to give up: "No, my Lord... I cannot flee to the hills!... let me flee to this small town!" - "I will also grant you the favour you now ask. I will not overthrow the town you speak of". Lot enters Zoar and the sulphurous rain of fire begins to fall on Sodom and Gomorrah.

When Lot asks to take refuge in Zoar, he wishes to save only himself. However, the Lord is happy to have the legal pretext to save all the inhabitants of Zoar: the Father’s Mercy is ready to save whatever can be saved even in extremis, as long as someone gives Him the possibility to come into action.
Today we are waiting for cosmic catastrophes: two thirds of humanity should perish, and then there are wars, earthquakes... These are all things we are awaiting from day to day, as inevitable. But why don't we become aware of our powerful dignity as God’s children? We are greater than Abraham and Lot, we are God’s children because through Baptism we have become a member of the divine family.

Why don’t we believe in our power of intercession? We have the power to release God’s Mercy which is much more powerful than all the evil and sin in the world. We only have to convince ourselves that our Father, in order to accomplish this plan of salvation, needs someone who might provoke His salvific intervention.

Roam the streets of Jerusalem...

Elsewhere we made an appeal in order to find someone who could join us in asking our Father for our liberation. We said that two of us would be sufficient, as the minimum Jesus suggested, in order to have the certainty that our request would be granted. However, at most, even one person would be sufficient:

"Roam the streets of Jerusalem, look about and observe, search through her public places, to find even one who lives uprightly and seeks to be faithful, and I will pardon her, says the Lord." (Jer 5,1)

In order to give full weight to the words of the prophet Jeremiah – who was born around 650 BC – we should go back to his period of tragic spiritual decadence that will prepare for the downfall of the kingdom of Judah with the destruction of the temple and two deportations carried out by Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah lives the dramatic history of his homeland by preaching, threatening, predicting the downfall and uselessly warning the incompetent kings, and he is accused of defeatism by the soldiers, persecuted and imprisoned.

He is sent "to root up and to tear down, to destroy and to demolish" (Jer 1,10). He must always fight against his own people, against the kings, the priests, the false prophets, the entire people; he becomes "the man of strife and contention to all the land" (Jer 15,10) since he must especially predict misfortunes.
If Jeremiah came back today, he would find a worsened moral situation compared to his times and on a wider international scale, and his preaching would have more fiery tones, if it were possible: "Nothing new under the sun", says Qoelet.

But hand in hand with man’s malice advances the Power of the Father’s Mercy: "the more you keep on offending me, the more I will keep on forgiving you.... if I find among you even one man who lives uprightly and who seeks to be faithful, I will forgive this ungrateful humanity!"

"I will forgive this ungrateful humanity!"

Does this innocent man exist today? Yes, JESUS.

It is Jesus who has become the "son of man", who epitomizes all men and who continues the redemption in every man. There are millions and millions of men in whom Jesus - the only Innocent one - lives, loves and suffers continuing the redemption. That is, there are millions and millions of "innocent ones" who we, as priests, in every Mass have the power to present to the Father every day.
In every Mass we present to the Father of Mercy the hundreds of thousands of children who have consecrated themselves to Him in these last few years "for peace in the world and for the conversion of sinners", through Mary, with Mary and for Mary, and in whom Jesus continues to say: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit... my body and my will, for everyone and for humanity";

in every Mass we present to the Father of Mercy the more than one billion babies killed by abortion, in whom Jesus continues to immolate Himself saying "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing";

in every Mass we present to the Father the hundreds of millions of children who are forced to do inhuman jobs from a very young age and who are abused in a thousand ways, in whom Jesus continues to live His most terrible passion;

in every Mass we present to the Father all the millions of desperate and suffering poor people in the world – basically all men! – who are the constant object of His infinite tenderness.

My brothers, do not be afraid, be joyful. If we ask for it, we are all saved, because today we can thus respond to the request the Father makes through Jeremiah:

"Father of Jesus and my Father, our Father, we have done what you asked of us, we have roamed the streets of Jerusalem and the public places of every other city in the world, we have looked about and observed: we have found the man whom you have spoken of, the one man who lives uprightly and who seeks to be faithful to You: his name is JESUS. You know him well, because He is your Son and You wanted him to become "the son of man", one of us, our brother. For his sake forgive Jerusalem, forgive the world: because You have promised it, because You want to forgive us more than we want to be forgiven. Amen."

My beloved brothers, let nothing or nobody disturb us. Men get upset, but God leads them to a greater good. When we hear the drums of war, let us look to the sound of the bells which the Angels will ring in
flocks and let nothing at all trouble us; let us look ahead and sing the praise of God’s Victory.

Let nothing and nobody trouble us: let us already live in our hearts the new world: joy, peace, certainty, the Power of prayer, but above all trust in the Father’s Mercy which is more powerful than evil, sin and death.

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