

Mary Ward and Co.

Interessantes aus der Geschichte

Inherited Justice

A later experience of the “Just Soul”, after the letter from All Saints 1615 is recorded by Mary Ward in the inscription of picture 27 of the Painted Life. She puts this state of life in a christological context.

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According to the inscriptions of the Painted Life Mary Ward twice experienced the vision of “the Just Soul”, once on the feast of All Saints 1615 (picture 25) and a second time as shown in picture 27:

„When Mary pondered the words “ET VOCABIS NOMEN EIUS JESUM” in London God showed her a just soul gifted with great radiance and he signified clearly that all those who live their vocations according to this Institute, would reach such ineffable beauty of their souls because this state leads to the same inherited justice and makes them equable to Christ our Lord, the most perfect model of all virtues.”

Picture 26 deals with the crossing on St. Jacob’s day, 25th July 1618. Therefore the end of the year 1618 would appear for picture 27.

However, picture 28 is about a spiritual experience which happened, according to the writings of Mary Ward, in the spiritual exercises in April 1618. Therefore the sequence of pictures must be used with great caution for the dating of events. Incidentally Tobias Lohner whose Nymphenburg manuscript has the inscription of picture 27 does not mention the place, London.

Even if we cannot be completely certain about the dating we can still assume that the feast of the Name of Jesus in the Christmas Season was the cause of this meditation.

This is indicated not only by the depiction of the Christmas scene in the picture but also by the reminiscence to the contemplation of the incarnation in the exercises:

(EB 107): Listening to what the persons are saying: some expressing care for those suffering, some expressing hatred

(EB 108): I watch the different activities in which people engage....,others in wounding and killing.. etc.



The closeness to the exercises in April 1618 can also be assumed in which Mary after the fourth contemplation about the Principle and Foundation noted down:

I was happy when I saw that the way which Jesus took in the use of all things created was the most perfect one. I loved that and aspired to taking the same path, mainly because he himself took it. (...)To go forward as Christ did, was all the happiness I wanted from this life, since this seemed to be

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better for me than any other spiritual gift. (...) Here I promised, (...) to embrace everything with great affection what would make me similar to Christ in life and in my way of life. (D 172 C)

Certainly Mary Ward links the words, “you must name him Jesus” (Lk 1.31) with her Institute, for she was told twice to name it Jesus. Now she gets the assurance that all those, who live in this Institute according to its way of life, will “reach such ineffable beauty of their souls”.

There is a twofold explanation for this:

This way of life leads to an “inherited” justice.

This way of life makes them akin to Christ, the perfect model of all virtues.

Unfortunately we do not know Mary Ward’s exact words of this vision but only the summary in the inscription of the picture. We would also have to examine if and how the phrase “*inherited justice*” was used in Mary Ward’s time as the term Justice as the superior virtue that includes everything seems to be taken from an recently published work from Robert Bellarmin.

It is certain that this inherited justice is the positive counterpart to original sin. In 1615 Mary Ward had realized that “*people in paradise before the fall of man were in this state*”. Starting from such an origin she takes the aim in account, that “*this way of life of ours may last to the end of the world because it goes back to the original state*”. And for the present she lives in the hope, “*that the Lord let me see this, to invite me to this path and because at the right time he would give me the grace to reach such a state, at least to a certain degree.*”

According to St. Paul all those are heirs of God and of his justice who allow themselves to be guided by the Spirit of God. “And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, provided that we share his suffering, so as to share his glory.” (Rom 8.17) For God “bestows his justice in the present time, to show that he is just and makes just those who believe in Jesus.” (8.23)

To come into this inheritance means to dress in the garment of Christ, to follow him and to become equable to him. He is the model for everything we do, his conduct is more and more internalized by repeated meditation of the Gospels, so that it coins our own lives and actions.

With Mary Ward we may emphasize Jesus’ mode of behavior and characteristic: a singular freedom from everything which may make us depend on earthly things, together with full commitment and ability to all good works;

The freedom to refer all to God

Who is as he seems and shows himself as he is,

Together with true wisdom from the constant vigilance and care for the cooperation with the grace of God.

With this insight, implied in the inscription of picture 27 Mary Ward will probably have lost the fear which still worried her in the exercises in 1618 that “*the imitation of our savior which I now long for so much, may not be consistent with my decision and the way of life I chose*”, a fear which at that time “*took away the effect from her request for the grace to follow the example of Christ*”. (D 172 C)

That is what we are meant to do in our lives (as religious): to make visible the beauty of Jesus –simply to the degree to which it is possible for us.