

THE HOLY FAMILY'S DONKEY

P. Ribes, s. j.

I Knew It! IKnew It! Inner Spiritual Perception

Thrust of the Fable

- ✓ *In matters divine, reason alone does not suffice.*
- ✓ *God is grasped and experienced with the "heart" not with the intellect.*
- ✓ *With the mind we may come to know about God, but not to know Him.*
- ✓ *To realize that "doctrines", "creeds", "dogmas" and "rituals" cannot satisfy the heart of a deeply religious man as much as a personal experience of God.*

A Fable

Narrator: In the days of the Emperor Augustus an order went out to all the citizens of the Roman Empire to report to their home towns and register for the census. So Joseph went to Bethlehem with Mary, his spouse. She was expecting and the time for delivery was near

A poor man he was, all that Joseph could afford to make the journey comfortable for Mary was a lean and half-starved donkey.

That donkey had never before in his life found such loving and considerate masters. They gave him to eat and drink, patted him, washed him, and loved him. The dumb creature felt something extraordinary in the life of his new masters. He sensed a peace, a joy, something he could not explain. He muttered to himself:

Donkey: I can't understand it. After all I am a donkey. But I know for sure that this man and this woman are not like the rest of men. There is something divine in them...

Narrator: Joseph and Mary, travel-worn and weary, arrived in Bethlehem, and went to a wayside inn to secure a place for the night. It was late night and the inn was full up. Joseph knocked at the door and earnestly begged for a little corner whereon to rest their tired limbs. The inn-keeper, a heartless man, looked at Joseph and Mary and yelled at them.

Innkeeper: Who do you think you are? V.I.P. 's? How dare disturb me at this part of the night! No! No place here for the likes of you! Out!

Narrator: Shocked and grieved to see Joseph and Mary so shabbily treated, the donkey began crying and braying. In a rage the inn-keeper turned to the donkey and bellowed.

Innkeeper: Shut up, you dumb animal! Don't disturb my guests! An ass you had to be! I'll show you!

Narrator: And with that, he lunged forward and mercilessly kicked the humble creature in its belly. Then he bawled at Joseph and Mary.

Inn-keeper: Get the hell out of here before I kick you also!

Narrator: Mary and Joseph humbly moved away sorrowing. The donkey was crying. That night, they took shelter in a dark, cold and smelly stable outside the village. There were quite a few animals there - cows, oxen, dogs, horses... All the stable inmates were much annoyed at the presence of the intruders; especially of the donkey. They began poking fun at the donkey.

Animals: Look at the precious mount these people have brought in here. Ha, ha, ha! See, how clever it looks! See how beautiful, how graceful! Ha, ha, ha! Have you ever heard a sweeter voice than his to entertain us? Surely, we shall fall asleep very soon with his gentle lullaby

Narrator: At midnight, Mary gave birth to her babe; she wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger near-by. Only Joseph and the little donkey were there to offer the mother and the child some assistance and company. After a little while there was a shuffle of feet, followed by a rush of people into the stable. A crowd of simple, illiterate shepherds filled the entire stable. Staring at the child with wonder they bowed down before him and worshipped him:

Shepherds: Hosanna! Welcome Savior! Hail! Christ the Lord! Praise be to you, our Messiah! Hosanna! Hosanna!.

Narrator: The donkey was all ears and eyes. He rejoiced over all he saw and heard. He too, braying joined the shepherds in their chorus of praise to the new born child! The animals in the stable were irritated at that hullabaloo. They looked at the shepherds disdainfully and mumbled scornfully.

Animals: Look at these stupid and ignorant shepherds! Idiots! Hosanna to whom? To this beggar-child cast up here, from nowhere? This pulling and mewling infant? Savior? Messiah?, Poo! Lord! Nonsense! Ha, ha, ha! How can this be the Lord? He is weak! He is helpless! He is like any ordinary child! Absurd! Crap!

Narrator: As the shepherds left the stable, there was silence. Then all of a sudden the donkey's voice was heard.

Donkey: Hosanna! Welcome, Lord! Welcome, my Savior! I know you are all these things and much more... Hosanna!

Narrator: The animals of the stable were furious at him and shouted:

Animals: How can you say that this baby is the Lord, the Christ, the Messiah, and the Savior?

Donkey: Because it is true! It's certain!

Animals: True? Certain? Come on, if so, prove it!

Donkey: I can't prove it. I have no brains, but I know it! I know it in my inmost being! I feel it in my bones!

Animals: If you have no brains, then how can you know that this child is the Savior?

Donkey: I know it! I know it!..... It's true, I have no brains! But don't you know that I have a heart that feels, that loves? It is my heart that tells me the truth, the whole truth!

Animals: Shut your mouth! We cannot reason out things with you. You are "too wise" for us!

Donkey: Yes, I have the wisdom of my heart by far surpassing the knowledge of your brains! My heart has reasons of which your heads know nothing! I know it... I know it... I know it!.... There are so many things we know to be true which we cannot prove or understand... Essential knowledge does not come from our head, but from the heart... All essential knowledge dwells therein. It is only when we enter into our hearts that we can penetrate the 'heart' of truth... I know it!... I know it!... I know it!...

Narrator: After that, the animals of the stable cursed the donkey and left him alone. After that, 33 years had rolled by... the baby Jesus had become the man Jesus... the Prophet, the Master, the Miracle worker, the Savior, the Messiah, the Christ... It was Palm Sunday. Jesus wanted the entire world to know that he was The Savior, The Lord, he Messiah, The Christ On that day, Jesus said to his disciples

Christ: Go to the village there ahead of you. As you go, you will find a donkey tethered to a tree. Untie it and bring it here. I need it. I want to make my glorious entry into the city of Jerusalem riding on a donkey so that the whole world may know that I am the Savior, Messiah, and Lord.

Narrator: A little later, Jesus triumphantly entered the Holy City of Jerusalem mounted on a donkey. As he rode on, people spread their clothes on the ground for the donkey to walk on... and they chanted: "Hosanna! God bless the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna to our Savior and Lord! All the animals in the town, green with jealousy were looking at the donkey bearing an honor that ill befitted to his asinine creature and grumbled:

Animals: Why has our Savior and King chosen a donkey of all creatures to ride triumphantly into our city? Are we not more intelligent and clever than the donkey? Are we not more respectable and honorable animals than this stupid beast of burden?

Narrator: But our happy donkey, at every step he took, as if agreeing fully with what they said, nodded his head at all of them. And at every nod he brayed from the depth of his heart for the entire world to hear:

Donkey: I knew it!... I knew it!... I knew it!... .

POINTS FOR REFLECTION

- It is the simple, the poor and the despised who are the first to understand the mysteries of God's kingdom.
- God always showed his preferences for the poor and the downtrodden when he wanted to disclose Himself to the world.
- We have to become like little children if we wish to enter the kingdom of God.
- Reason abstracts from reality. It gives only partial views, and aspects of reality.
- Concepts encapsulate part of the truth, not the whole truth.
- Our minds dissect, freeze, fossilize single aspects of reality and tend to present them as the whole truth!
- Reality is much too big for our puny minds to comprehend it in its entirety. Our minds themselves are but a small part of reality.
- It is the "heart" that takes in reality in its existential sweep. We mean by "heart" the whole reality of man: his physical and psychological makeup, his intuition, and his imagination and gut-feelings.
- We know with the "heart" many things we cannot rationally prove! On the other hand, it's possible to prove with our minds things we do not know!
- Very small children know who is a friend to them, and who is an enemy, who loves them and who does not, yet they cannot prove it! They just know!
- In every genuine encounter, human or divine, we only know what we experienced!
- We experience with the totality of our being...
- Our minds do not experience things; they only work on what has been given to them by our senses and feelings.
- God is not an object of knowledge but rather a subject of religious experience, and an object of faith.
- With our minds we can only know about God. It is only through a religious experience that to a certain extent we can know God.
- Our relationship with God is gauged not so much by how much we know about him but by how much we love him and how much we experienced his presence.
- It is the heart that holds the key to the "heart of truth".