

work upon me. For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always (Matthew 26,6 sqq.).

The news about spending 10 000 franks, the incomprehensible deed committed by Babette, came as a total shock to the practical Martina and Philippa and for a moment produced their great compassion and pity: *Now you'll be poor for the rest of your life*, to which they heard the response: *An artist is never poor*. Perhaps one should say: Mary and Martha share this victory. The film contains the following scene: at the end of the feast the guests go to a second room for coffee, Philippa sits down to the piano, Martina chooses a place next to the general, and the previously contravened members of the congregation whose faces lit up during the evening and whose tongues were loosened, now exchange blessings. The camera leads us over the abandoned "supper" to the kitchen-workshop where Babette, exhausted and holding a wine glass, sits down at the table and takes a sip, deep in thought and as if even more absent. The first chords are heard from afar. She raises her eyes and glances full of comprehension and recognition in the direction from which the piano is heard, transferring us to the room in which Philippa starts singing. This song (and scene) appears to be the summit of the evening (despite the fact that they precede the finale of the whole film). The song is about a day coming to an end, the passage of life, encroaching conclusion. It also beseeches: *Be for us our infinite Light in the valley of night and: Admit us to Thy mercy divine* (whilst Babette remains behind firmly shut kitchen doors). The cited words allude to Psalm 23: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil* and in the next verse: *Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over*, to the aforementioned sacrifice, startling the disciples. This is an old Protestant hymn with lyrics and music by the German poet Georg Newark: *Wer nur den lieben Gott läßt walten*. I believe that it also comments on the fate of all the characters (concerned with their choice or uncertain about it) and, predominantly, on the fate of Babette, her story, experiences and offering. After all, it foretells her triumph, soon to take place, and seems to be "a response given to Martha" a mere moment before the recognition of the servant not only as a great artist but also as Mary:

*If thou but suffer God to guide thee,
And hope in Him through all thy ways,
He'll give thee strength whate'er betide thee,
And bear thee through the evil days.
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
Builds on the rock that nought can move.
What can these anxious cares avail thee,
These never-ceasing moans and sighs?
What can it help, if thou bewail thee
O'er each dark moment as it flies?*

*Our cross and trials do but press
The heavier for our bitterness.
Only be still and wait His leisure
In cheerful hope, with heart content
To take whate'er thy Father's pleasure
And all-deserving love hath sent
Nor doubt our inmost wants are known
To Him who chose us for His own.
He knows the time for joy, and truly
Will send it when He sees it meet,
When He has tried and purged thee thoroughly
And finds thee free from all deceit,
He comes to thee all unaware
And makes thee own His loving care.
Nor think amid the heat of trial
That God hath cast thee off unheard,
That he whose hopes meet no denial
Must surely be of God preferred;
Time passes and much change doth bring,
And sets a bound to everything.
All are alike before the Highest.
'Tis easy to our God, we know,
To raise thee up though low thou liest,
To make the rich man poor and low;
True wonders still by Him are wrought
Who setteth up and brings to nought.
Sing, pray, and keep His ways unswerving,
So do thine own part faithfully,
And trust His Word, though undeserving,
Thou yet shalt find it true for thee!
God never yet forsook at need
The soul that trusted Him indeed.*

Endnotes

- ¹ Statement from an interview given by Daniele Parra in: "La Revue du Cinema", no. 437/88, cited after: material ed. Manana Chyb in "Filmowy Serwis Prasowy".
- ² In Denmark the film was received less enthusiastically. The reception was rather chilly and critics concentrated on the faithfulness of the screen adaptation, perceived as a blow against the status and sacredness of the *oeuvre* of Karen Blixen; emphasis was also placed on the dangers of cinematic trivialisation. Cf. Anne Jerslev, *Hvad laver Babette i Vestjylland? Babettes Gaestebud – en filmatisering mellem and og kod, billeder og banalisering*, "Satiden" no. 4/1991, pp. 63-71.
- ³ Xavier Leon-Dufour SJ, *Słownik Nowego Testamentu*, transl. and prep. Rev. Kazimierz Romaniuk, Poznań 1981, p. 254.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 532.
- ⁵ Henri Daniel Rops, *Dzieje Chrystusa*, transl. Zofia Starowieyska-Morstinowa, Warszawa 1972, p. 241.
- ⁶ Origen, *Homilie o Ewangelii św. Łukasza*, phrase 72, in: *Pisma Starochrześcijańskich pisarzy*, vol. XXXVI, transl. and prep. Stanisław Kalinkowski, introduction Rev. Marek Starowieyski, Warszawa 1986, p. 168.
- ⁷ Y. Lotman, *Symbol w systemie kultury*, "Polska Sztuka Ludowa" 1988, no. 3, pp. 151-154.
- ⁸ Origen, op. cit., p. 168.