



Introduction

In the annals of Christian history, there exist certain documents that, although not officially recognized by the Church as authentic, have inspired devotion and contemplation among the faithful for centuries. One such document is the mysterious and fascinating *Letter of Lentulus*. Supposedly attributed to a Roman governor contemporary to Jesus — Publio Lentulus — this letter movingly describes the figure of Christ.

Is it real or a pious creation? Does it have anything to say to us today, in a world so saturated with images and so thirsty for authenticity? This article not only aims to present the historical background of the letter but also seeks to help you see Jesus with new eyes — the eyes of the heart — as a guide for your spiritual life.

What is the Letter of Lentulus?

The so-called *Epistle of Lentulus* is a document supposedly written by a Roman official who lived in the time of Jesus. Traditionally, Lentulus is said to have been a predecessor or even a contemporary of Pontius Pilate in Judea. In his letter, addressed to the Roman Senate or Emperor Tiberius (depending on the version), he describes in detail the physical appearance, demeanor, and character of Jesus of Nazareth.

Here is a representative excerpt from the text:

“At this time has appeared a man still living, whose name is Jesus the Christ. The people call Him a prophet of truth, and His disciples, the Son of God. He raises the dead and heals all manner of diseases... He is a man of tall stature, with a venerable aspect that inspires both love and fear in those who behold Him. His hair is the color of ripe wine and falls to His shoulders in soft curls. He has a wide and serene forehead, piercing blue eyes... In His bearing there is dignity, in His words, wisdom. Never has a man been seen like this among mortals.”



Throughout the centuries, this portrait has inspired both artists and mystics. Many of the medieval and even Renaissance depictions of Christ reflect this majestic, merciful, and deeply human image of Jesus.

Is the Letter Authentic?

From a historical and philological perspective, the authenticity of the letter is more than doubtful. It does not appear in ancient Roman sources and contains anachronisms typical of the Middle Ages. Scholars agree that it was likely written between the 13th and 15th centuries as a devotional exercise.

However, the fact that it is not a historically reliable document from the first century does not invalidate its spiritual value. Like many pious legends, the letter reflects a form of visual *lectio divina* — a written meditation on the face of Christ, created not to inform, but to invite contemplation.

Theological Relevance: The Face of Christ

In Catholic theology, contemplation of the face of Christ holds central importance. St. Paul affirms:

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

The *Letter of Lentulus*, in this sense, can be read as an aid in fulfilling that call to transformative contemplation. What it describes is not as important as whether it helps you truly encounter Christ, to turn your inner gaze to Him, and from there, be molded by Him.

The Second Vatican Council, in the constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, reminds us that:



“The mystery of man is only made clear in the mystery of the incarnate Word” (GS 22).

To see Christ — or better, to contemplate Him in spirit and truth — is the deepest way to know ourselves, to heal, and to walk in holiness.

Practical Applications: What Can the Letter Teach Us Today?

1. Recovering the Contemplation of the Face of Christ

In the midst of a culture of images — fast, superficial, manipulated — the *Letter of Lentulus* invites us to pause. When was the last time you stood before a crucifix or an icon of Christ and simply looked at Him? Without asking for anything? Just to be with Him?

***Spiritual Exercise:** Spend five minutes a day looking at an image of Christ — the one that inspires you the most — and repeat inwardly: “Show me Your face, Lord” (cf. Psalm 27:8). Say no more. Just contemplate.*

2. Humanity and Divinity United

The text presents a Jesus who is majestic but full of tenderness, dignified in His bearing but without arrogance. This is the Christological synthesis that the Church has safeguarded since the earliest councils: Jesus is true God and true man.

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory” (John 1:14).

Contemplating Christ humanizes us. It reminds us that holiness is not at odds with humanity — it elevates it. To be like Christ is to be profoundly human, profoundly true.



3. Beauty as a Path to God

The Letter of Lentulus highlights a serene beauty in Jesus. Not a superficial or sensual beauty, but a moral, spiritual, complete beauty. That beauty which, as Dostoevsky said, “*will save the world.*”

Practical Application: *Surround yourself with beauty that leads to God: sacred art, sacred music, elevated words, good actions. Educate your sensitivity so your soul hungers for the beautiful, the good, and the true.*

A Pastoral Guide Through the Contemplation of Christ

For Those Wounded by the Faith:

Many have been wounded by scandals, clericalism, or bad experiences with members of the Church. The face of Christ described by Lentulus can be a balm: not the face of power, but of love. Not of immediate judgment, but of serene welcome.

Pastoral Advice: Return to the Gospel. Look at the Jesus of the poor, the sinners, the children. Encounter Him again without filters. Begin by reading the Gospel of Mark, slowly and prayerfully.

For Those Seeking the True Jesus:

Today, many seek authenticity. The portrait of Lentulus points to a Jesus who inspires respect without imposing, who moves without manipulating, who transforms with just a glance. That is the Jesus we find in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist.

Spiritual Advice: Attend Mass not as a spectator, but as a disciple. Look upon the Lord in the Eucharist and say, “I want to see Your face.”



For Those Who Wish to Be More Like Christ:

The model of Jesus described in the letter is one of serenity, justice, humility, and wisdom. Is this not what the world needs today? Fathers, educators, Christian leaders... all are called to reflect that face.

Practical Advice: Choose one virtue of Christ each month (patience, meekness, firmness, mercy) and ask for His help to live it out in your daily life. Make a brief examination of conscience each night and ask yourself: *What part of Christ's face did I reflect today?*

Conclusion: Beyond the Text

The *Letter of Lentulus* is not a gospel, nor a historically reliable source. But it has something many treatises lack: the power to ignite the heart. It reminds us that Christ is not an idea, but a face. And that our Christian life begins, is sustained, and culminates when we encounter that face — like Peter, like Paul, like Mary Magdalene — and follow Him without turning back.

| *“Show us Your face, Lord, and we shall be saved” (cf. Psalm 80:4).*

Final Prayer

| ***Lord Jesus, face of the Father, perfect image of Love:***

We seek You not in ancient documents, but in the truth of Your Word, in the light of Your face, in the peace You give.

Help us to look upon You with faith, to find You in the ordinary, to reflect You in our daily lives.

May those who look at us see a glimpse of Your beauty, Your compassion, Your serene justice.



| *Amen.*

If this article has touched your heart or helped you look upon Christ with new eyes, share it with others. The contemplation of the face of Christ is not a spiritual luxury — it is a necessity for today's world.