

3. The wire on which everything is hung

There is a point between us and Christ that either makes our vocation which we receive function or not, a point which is like an electric wire on which the proper functioning of every vocation depends. And every vocation is important; every vocation is great. The vocation of every baptized member is always great, from the newborn who passes away just a minute after baptism to the Pope who moves the crowds, because every baptized person is called to be, in Christ, a child of God who carries out in the world and for the entire world the Redemption, the renewing of all reality in the power of the Holy Spirit poured out on us in virtue of the death and resurrection of Christ.

So what is this point, this wire that makes everything else work or not work, if it makes things go or not go even if everything is apparently up and running? Jesus says, or rather violently yells at Peter, “You are an obstacle to me, for you do not think as God does, but as human beings do!” (Mt 16:23).

It is as if everything depended on this “thinking,” on this *phronein*, this *sapĕre*, this sensing, perceiving, experiencing, judging of Peter before Jesus. Everything hangs on our thinking according to God or according to human beings. It’s like a ridge or a blade that divides reality between the Kingdom of God, in which Christ is Lord and king, and the kingdom of the world, dominated by Satan.

Let us imagine what a shiver must have run through Peter in that moment as he realized that one thought was enough, one single way of thinking, of judging, of being convinced of something, that one sentiment was enough to make him slide—he, the rock on which Christ wanted to build His Church, to whom Christ wanted to entrust the universal, catholic, “management” of the world’s Redemption—one thought was enough to make him slide down to the abyss of that dark reign of Satan, who had from the beginning of God’s merciful thought toward all His creatures been opposed to such a plan.

It happened to me once, many years ago during my military service, that I fell and slid down an icy patch of snow. I couldn’t stop myself, and I wasn’t able to grab hold of anything, so I slid and slid, with increasing speed, toward a group of rocks that would have stopped me. The human body has the tendency to be turned around when sliding, and so I was afraid of having my head cracked open by the rocks. It was definitely one of those moments in which our Lady and my guardian angel or a few of the saints preserved my life, because my legs and feet landed safely on the rocks.

Even Peter, for a few seconds, must have felt that he was lost, finished, destroyed. But Jesus immediately put Peter’s freedom back on solid ground, and with him that of the other disciples, by reopening the way of vocation, appealing once again to their freedom to follow Him, and to follow Him toward His dramatic paschal vocation: “Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If someone wishes to follow me, let him renounces himself, take up his cross, and follow me...’.” (Mt 16:24f.)

The rebuke of Peter seemed to have destroyed the entire ecclesial system that had just been announced. And together with the rock on which Jesus wished to build it, all the other rocks, the apostles especially, were seemingly demolished. Instead, note how Jesus, right after the earthquake, begins immediately to rebuild with the same rocks. He begins again with Peter first, resuming and repeating the beginning, the first glance, the first word, the first call that the apostles received on the shore of the sea: "If someone wishes to follow me..."

But if at the outset of their discipleship Jesus was the one asking—for they did not know anything and they didn't know Him, even if they had perceived an irresistible attraction to Him—now it is as though they themselves had to decide on their vocation, now they themselves would have to commit their entire liberty, a liberty that was clear, illuminated, aware of the meaning and significance, and therefore of the mission, that would go into the vocation of following Christ.

But inevitably, Peter and the disciples who heard these words right after the deafening thunder of "Get behind me, Satan!" had to make a direct connection to *phronein*, to *sapēre*, to having a sense of the things of God that Jesus put at the center of the question. These words in fact called for a judgment regarding one's self and the world that is totally opposed to the thought of the world. These words illustrated, rather, the criterion for a way of thinking according to God, and educated the disciples on how to form that way of thinking. With these words Jesus, as in the entire Gospel message, makes Himself the master of the thinking according to God, of a sense, a judgment, a glance at the reality of oneself and of everything, which adheres to the thinking and the sentiments of God.

We are children of a philosophical and cultural age which has greatly reduced the concept of thinking, and therefore of truth. Today, to speak of thinking is to speak of butterflies, of something fluttery and fleeting, extremely fragile, something which you simply can't lay hold of; and should you manage to grasp it, it breaks, leaving you with nothing but colored dirt in your hands...

When Jesus spoke of thinking to Peter, on the other hand, He did it with reference to a thought so consistent that it contains all of reality: the original and eternal Thought with which God created the universe and history, and decided even before the creation of man to join up with him by making Himself man, and assuming until death and resurrection the human destiny, even the consequences of his incorrect employing of the liberty given by God. In reproaching Jesus for His announcement of His passion and death, Peter, without realizing it, reproduced the refusal of the merciful thought of God which Lucifer and the other angels expressed with one single contrary thought, a single "No!", transforming themselves from angels into demons.

It is as though all the disciples of Christ found themselves about to relive that moment outside of time, in which the thought of God to love man until the Cross was either embraced or refused by the angelic hosts. Thinking as God does means exactly this: to embrace the divine and eternal design of loving man all the way to the Redemption in the blood of Christ. It is not possible to follow Christ truly without embracing this thinking as God does. It would be as if someone wanted to fly without wings, to sing without song, to illuminate without light...