

8. Christ calls us above all to Himself

Life rediscovered and gained is life redeemed, “repurchased” from the Risen one. And Christ asks us and gives us the ability to follow him by giving us an experience of this mystery of rebirth here and now, in the circumstances of our lives, of our crosses. This is a rebirth of the “I” that only Christ makes possible.

When Peter rejects the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus, he is rejecting this experience – this experience that he, Peter, must have. He is rejecting the Redemption. He is opposing Christ’s descent into hell to redeem his humanity, his life. He is opposing that total renewal of his “I” which Christ alone could offer him. Thus, he was opposing the fascination that made him fall in love with Jesus in the very beginning, and which had given him the freedom and self-confidence to renounce everything for Him. But in that everything there was not yet he himself, Simon son of John, with all that he was or was not.

It is incredible how Jesus found scandalous the resistance of only one person to the entire work of Redemption. It was as if Peter had had the power to resist not only his own redemption, but the redemption of the entire world. This, not only because he was Peter (and had just been established as the “rock” of the Church), since in the worst case Jesus could have replaced him with another; but it was because Christ had such love for each and every human being, that even if one person refuses salvation he suffers as if all had refused. Jesus died for every single person. He poured out all his blood for every single person. Because he is truly aware of what he says: namely, that even one life, a single heart, is worth more than the entire world (cf. Mt 16:26), because it is valuable in the eyes of God, in the thought of God, in the relationship that God has with every person for the simple fact that he created it, that he wants it, that he gives it freedom, that he is not at rest until he saves it, until it returns to the house of the Father.

For this reason, in order to be serious about our vocation, to live it in truth, that is in fidelity, above all our baptismal vocation but already our vocation as human beings (really in every form of vocation what is at stake is always our own person and all humanity created and redeemed), the first step is a sense for our “I”, the feeling for ourselves that is solicited by the encounter with Christ, His face, His word.

Every vocation calls, is a call, pronounces a name – it calls me. It does not call me in the first place to something, to do something, and not even to become something or someone. It calls me, and by calling me releases in me a sense for myself that earlier I did not feel, that earlier I did not know. This point is very important – and the Bible illustrates it from the beginning to the end in the patriarchs, the prophets, the judges, all the way to the apostles, disciples and all the women and men Christ encountered, and then to St. Stephen, St. Paul and all the Christians of the first communities. This point is so important that it is as if everything else were secondary, a consequence which takes effect automatically. If the “I” responds, if the “I” reacts, if it allows itself to be encountered, if the “I” says “Here I am!” – that is, “Behold, I am here!” – like Mary, then the Holy Spirit fills everything, develops everything, unfolds the entire mission that the vocation involves.

Once I used to visit a fragile and complicated community, complicated by the fear it had in allowing itself to be helped, and also by the fact that it had been neglected in the past. On the first evening, I was with the person who was accompanying me on the visit and we felt depressed. The visit had begun poorly, and we felt that the doors were closed even before we had entered.

The next morning, however, at mass the Gospel of the day was the beginning of Matthew 10: "Then he summoned his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness. The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, the son of Zebedee, and his brother John; Philip and Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James, the son of Alpheus, and Thaddeus; Simon the Cananean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him" (Mt 10:1-4).

What immediately convicted me, and what also consoled me in the situation I was experiencing in this community, was that everything begins with Jesus calling to himself: "Then he summoned [to himself] – *proskalesamenos – convocatis*." It is the first call, the first vocation, the one in which we spend our freedom above all and essentially by responding to the invitation that Christ gives us to go to him, to reach his presence. Our entire liberty comes into play here, and everything else is a consequence. And what a consequence! He "gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to cure every disease and every illness." I beg your pardon if it's little! And just afterwards, as if this were not enough, Jesus specifies and increases the superhuman power that he gives his disciples: "Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons." (Mt 10,8a). And so that they would not forget that all this power is a free consequence to their response to a free invitation, he says: "Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give" (Mt 10,8b).

This call convicted me and corrected me, because the day earlier, and during the night, I had not faced the situation of this community with this awareness. I had not been determined by this event in which God makes himself present in order to be able to call us to Himself, to gather us around Himself with the simplicity of a mother who calls her children home from playing outside, or with the simplicity of a friend who invites you inside to have a drink at his house.

I and the one accompanying me had deduced necessary consequences without accounting for the premises – we had skipped over the premises, the source and origin of necessary consequences. And by doing that we had erected ourselves as the source of those consequences. And so we immediately felt arid, dry, sterile, incapable of assuring even the smallest bit of what the situation required. Thank goodness! At least we had the truth of our feeling impotent and of the relative sadness – that is, at least our heart did not lie to us. But sadness would have remained, along with sterility, if the gratuity of the mystery, through the Church, in this case the liturgy, had not once again presented before us the call of Christ to Himself, his invitation to go with Him with an empty heart, with sadness experienced in truth, as neediness for Another.